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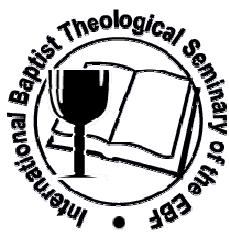
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## Editorial

Whilst preparing this edition of our Journal we have had a summer of hyper-activity at IBTS, Prague, playing host to the Centenary Conference of the Baptist Historical Society (United Kingdom); the Annual Gathering of the Baptist World Alliance; the Seventh Baptist International Conference of Theological Educators (BICTE VII) and the Fifth Forum of the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS V). One might think the time had come to have an Old Testament Jubilee! Well, in a way we are, by launching into the 60<sup>th</sup> Diamond Jubilee year of IBTS and the ninth year of publishing this *Journal*. It may not be the expected approach to emerge from a frenetic period of action, to indulge in more of the same, but we can't help it somehow. There are so many important things to be done and so many exciting ideas to be shared.

Thinking about anniversaries – whether centenaries or diamond jubilees, there has been much acknowledgement in Baptist, Christian and secular circles of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. He is an iconic figure to people of my generation. His stand for civil rights and his embrace of a wider agenda of justice stand out, even with the passage of time, as a moment of real transformation, not only in the USA, but throughout the world. Here is an outstanding exponent of non-violent campaigning, which others have followed, rooted in the ideas of Gandhi, drawn from the Gospel message of Jesus. In this edition of our Journal Ian M. Randall makes his own tribute to King, seeking to point out the deep Baptist convictions of King, often overlooked in other writings about his life and work.

King met his death at the hands of an assassin. Our second article re-examines thinking on Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament. My colleague, Robin Routledge, argues the case for a growing scholarly consensus that Sheol is not the final destiny of the dead in the Old Testament, but that there is an embryo affirmation of a communal future hope.

Finally, we offer the second part of the important paper by Parush Parushev on the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews from *Shoah*. The first part is to be found in Volume 8, Number 3, pages 40-51, and should be re-read before feasting on this second part, which seeks a theological explanation for the actions of Bulgarian Christians in the Second World War and offers important insights for addressing Jewish-Christian relationships after the *Shoah*.

**The Revd Dr Keith G Jones**  
Rector, IBTS

## The Baptist Convictions of Martin Luther King Jr (1929-1968)

‘I am many things to many people’, Martin Luther King Jr. acknowledged in 1965, in an article in the magazine *Ebony*, ‘but in the quiet recesses of my heart, I am fundamentally a clergyman, a Baptist preacher. This is my being and my heritage for I am also the son of a Baptist preacher, the grandson of a Baptist preacher and the great-grandson of a Baptist preacher.’<sup>1</sup> In a great deal of King’s own published work, and certainly in much of the literature about him, his specifically Baptist convictions are not prominent. He emphasised his indebtedness to a variety of academic influences and in his non-violent campaigns he acknowledged the influence of well-known figures such as Gandhi. This enabled him to connect with a wide range of people. It is also the case that the particular strand within Baptist life which King represented – one marked by radical, socio-political involvement – is one that has been somewhat overshadowed by the deeply conservative political standpoint of some Baptist communities in the USA in more recent decades. A Baptist who is strongly sympathetic to King, T. Furman Hewitt, writing in 1998 about Baptists and ethics, spoke of the common perception of Baptists as ‘typically conservative’.<sup>2</sup>

In one of his essays in *Biography as Theology* (first published in 1974), James Wm. McClendon, Jr., explored several different interpretations of King. He noted that David L. Lewis, in *King, A Critical Biography*, treated King as a gifted orator and populist politician who was ignorant of political realities and was ultimately a failure.<sup>3</sup> However, McClendon argued that alongside that should be set William R. Miller’s emphasis on King’s desire for reconciliation, which could be seen by some as weakness. Miller’s book contains the idea of King as martyr.<sup>4</sup> McClendon also drew attention to those who portrayed King simply as a race leader.<sup>5</sup> McClendon showed, by an analysis of crucial episodes in King’s life, that these interpretations fail to do justice to a man for whom

<sup>1</sup> C. Carson, ‘Martin Luther King, Jr., and the African-American Social Gospel’, in T.E. Fulop and A.J. Raboteau, eds., *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> T. Furman Hewitt, ‘Mining the Baptist Tradition for Christian Ethics: Some Gems’, *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 63-80.

<sup>3</sup> James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1974, new edn. 1990), pp. 50-2; citing David L. Lewis, *King, A Critical Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1970). Republished in 1978, see footnote 21 below.

<sup>4</sup> McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, pp. 52-3; cf. W.R. Miller, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: His Life, Martyrdom, and Meaning for the World* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968).

<sup>5</sup> McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, pp. 52-3; C.E. Lincoln, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr., A Profile* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), and J.A. Williams, *The King God Didn’t Save* (New York: Coard-McCann, 1970).

'religion was more than peripheral, more than a politician's tool, more than a reformer's stratagem'.<sup>6</sup> I want to take this line of thought a little further and to argue that King cannot be properly understood if he is not set within the specific African American Baptist environment which shaped him and also to seek to show that his Baptist convictions were crucial to the emphases that characterised his life and work.

## Baptist heritage

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) belonged to a strong Baptist family, linked to Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. But the King family's ties to Baptist life went back much further – to the slave era. King spoke of the spiritual lineage he had, beginning with his great-grandfather, Willis Williams, who joined the Shiloh Baptist Church in Georgia in 1846. He was an 'exhorter'. The family tradition of fervent preaching continued, and Martin Luther King Sr. built up Ebenezer, Atlanta, from 400 members in 1931 to 4,000 in 1940.<sup>7</sup> King Jr. knew from his own family history about the malign power of racism. The Williams family left Shiloh Baptist Church when, like other Southern States' congregations, it divided along racial lines. Martin Luther King Sr. was active in protesting against segregationist practices. When King Jr. decided to be baptised as a young boy he was taking a step that would continue the Baptist tradition into which he was born. However, by contrast with many of his forebears and the way they expressed their faith, at the time of King Jr.'s baptism and for some years afterwards, his involvement in the church did not spring from deep conviction.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed there was much about the Black churches that King questioned. By his early teens he was well acquainted with the mechanics and the culture of church life,<sup>9</sup> but in this period he resisted the inevitable pressure to become a minister. As Stephen Oates puts it in his biography of King published in 1982, *Let the Trumpet Sound*: 'An emotional, fundamentalist ministry had little relevance to the modern world, he thought, and he wanted nothing to do with it.'<sup>10</sup> It was at Morehouse, an African American Baptist College in Atlanta where King studied from 1944 to 1948, that King's views began to change. He was profoundly

<sup>6</sup> McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, pp. 55-59. For a fascinating exploration of King's spiritual pilgrimage see F.L. Downing, *To See the Promised Land* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> C. Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol. I: Called to Serve* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 33-5, 361.

<sup>9</sup> For McClendon on religion as culture see James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Witness: Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), chapter 2, and specifically on Black church culture, pp. 85-8.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 14.

impressed by the College President, Benjamin Mays, whose sermons he found to be rational as well as spiritually powerful. Benjamin Mays' parents were former slaves. Mays himself decided that he was going to pursue the educational opportunities that were available to him and he gained a PhD from the University of Chicago. He was a Baptist minister in Atlanta before becoming President of Morehouse. Mays offered important perspectives on Black church life, pointing out (for example) that whereas there was much evidence of discrimination in the White churches, Black ministers preached the unity of humankind.<sup>11</sup> To a significant extent it was because of King's admiration for Mays, and his understanding of the social gospel as advocated by Mays, that King decided towards the end of his time at Morehouse that he was going to 'serve God and humanity' by becoming a Baptist minister.<sup>12</sup>

Mays was not the only inspirational role model that King found in African American Baptist life in his College and then Seminary period. Howard Thurman, the author of the social gospel volume *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949),<sup>13</sup> was a family friend. King Jr. made a point of listening to the dynamic William Holmes Borders, at Wheat Street Baptist, Atlanta, to Sandy Ray, Pastor of Brooklyn's Cornerstone Baptist Church, and to Gardner C. Taylor, at the huge Brooklyn Concord Baptist Church, one of the largest Baptist congregations in the country. At Morehouse King began to speak the language of theological liberalism, but by contrast with many White liberals, his experience as an African American meant that he was always aware of the reality of evil and suffering.<sup>14</sup> Yet King was deeply committed to finding coherent intellectual answers to the issues facing a divided society. Listening to Borders in particular, who had built Wheat Street Baptist into Atlanta's largest Black church, King found someone who had the academic credibility that his own father did not have. Both King Sr. and Borders had worked their way out of poverty to graduate from Morehouse College, and King Sr. was active in protesting against racial discrimination, but Borders had also studied at Garrett Theological Seminary, had obtained a Master's degree, and taught part-time at Morehouse College.<sup>15</sup> It was this combination that King Jr. admired.

In 1948 King entered Crozier Theological Seminary, Chester, Pennsylvania. His description of his theological pilgrimage at this point is a famous one. He wrote: 'I came early to Walter Rauschenbusch's

<sup>11</sup> B.E. Mays and J.W. Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933), pp. 388-9, cited by McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>12</sup> Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>13</sup> See Vincent Harding, 'A Dangerous Spirituality', *Sojourners*, Vol. 28 (1999), pp. 28-31.

<sup>14</sup> Lischer, *Preacher King*, p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> Carson 'Martin Luther King, Jr., and the African-American Social Gospel', p. 347.

*Christianity and the Social Crisis*, which left an indelible imprint on my thinking by giving me a theological basis for the social concern which had already grown up in me as a result of my early experiences. Of course there were points at which I differed with Rauschenbusch. I felt that he had fallen victim to the nineteenth century “cult of inevitable progress” which led him to a superficial optimism concerning man’s nature.<sup>16</sup> Crozier Seminary itself was a Baptist institution known for the progressive theological views of its teaching staff.<sup>17</sup> Out of just under 100 students, eleven of them were African Americans. For the first time King absorbed an integrationist atmosphere. Although the studies at Crozier were wide-ranging – it was here that King wrestled with Marxism and came to reject Marx’s materialistic interpretation of history – nonetheless there was serious engagement with the Baptist tradition. Oates, in his biography, misses this, failing to point out that Crozier was a Baptist institution or that Walter Rauschenbusch was a Baptist.<sup>18</sup>

In this period King was exploring not only the Black approach to the gospel and society but also the social gospel expounded by Baptists from the White community such as Rauschenbusch. However, King was to forge his own approach. McClendon suggests that while Rauschenbusch regarded *agape* love as good will, to be expressed in organised acts of kindness to alleviate social evils, King saw *agape* love as ‘aggressive non-violent social action, a powerful force reaching out towards an alienated enemy’.<sup>19</sup> It might be that the word ‘aggressive’ creates the wrong impression. Indeed McClendon quotes in this same section of his work how King was to tell an angry Black crowd gathering outside his bombed-out home in Montgomery, Alabama (bombed by aggressive Whites), to avoid retaliation, for ‘Jesus still cries out...“Love your enemies”...This is what we must live by’.<sup>20</sup> What is certain is that King drew from and remoulded his Baptist heritage in ways that were to prove potent.

## The beloved community

King, as a seminary student, began to seek to put into practice the understanding of Baptist life which he had imbibed. In 1948, having preached a trial sermon at Ebenezer, Atlanta, with Mays as one of his supporters, King was ordained as a minister of the National Baptist (later

<sup>16</sup> M.L. King, *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> For Crozier see W.H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), pp. 369-82.

<sup>18</sup> Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound*, pp. 25-6; Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol. I: Called to Serve*, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, p. 60.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

Progressive National Baptist) Convention.<sup>21</sup> Three years later he embarked on PhD studies at Boston University's prestigious School of Theology. For the first time he found himself in a theological environment that was not shaped by Baptist tradition – the school was a Methodist foundation. The trajectory of his PhD dissertation also seemed to be likely to move him away from any specifically Baptist focus. However, as he pursued his studies, which included an examination of the thinking of Paul Tillich, he came to the conclusion that to follow Tillich was to take a theological path that led inexorably to the concept of an impersonal God.<sup>22</sup> In the light of this, King came to view the idea of a personal God, who was in relationship with people, much more satisfying, although King would later come to feel that in this period he operated as if God was a 'metaphysical category'.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear that King's search for the personal dimension of relationship with God – although never the purely individualistic – was aided while he was at Boston by the 'Personalist' philosophy presented there, especially by Edgar S. Brightman.<sup>24</sup> Referring to Brightman's work, King spoke of his own longing for 'that religious experience which Dr Brightman so cogently speaks of', although at the same time King could think of moments in his life when he had, as he put it, been 'awe awokened'.<sup>25</sup> Smith and Zepp argue that the concept of the 'Beloved Community', which became central to King's thinking, and which has been described as perhaps King's 'most poignant phrase', was given theological and philosophical foundations by Personalism.<sup>26</sup> In one of his first published articles King spoke about the goals of 'reconciliation', the 'redemption' of humanity, and 'the creation of the beloved community'.<sup>27</sup> In the search for the roots of the term 'Beloved Community' as an expression of King's vision, attention has been given to Personalism, to the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce (who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation), and even to Rousseau's social contract.<sup>28</sup> But, as Richard

<sup>21</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol. I: Called to Serve*, p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> D.L. Lewis, *King: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> M.L. King, 'Pilgrimage to Nonviolence', in J.M. Washington, ed., *I have a Dream* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986), p. 61. See also C. Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.5: Threshold of a New Decade* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 419-25.

<sup>24</sup> See P. Deats and C. Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol. I: Called to Serve*, pp. 415-16.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp 'Martin Luther King's Vision of the Beloved Community', *Christian Century*, April 3, 1974, pp. 361-363. See their *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974). Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee talk about the poignancy in *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 405-6. I am indebted to Parush Parushev, the Academic Dean of IBTS, for this reference.

<sup>27</sup> M.L. King, 'Facing the challenge of a new age', in Washington, ed., *I have a Dream*, pp. 21-2. Papers, Vol. 3 p. 458.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Hanes Walton, *The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1971).

Lischer, argues, the beloved community existed in the earthly community in Ebenezer.<sup>29</sup> King saw community embodied in and through Baptist congregations. In 1951 he had the exciting experience of preaching at Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn. There were, he knew, many similar African American Baptist communities led by inspiring preachers. What examples, he asked his Methodist colleagues at Boston, do you have? They could name only one.<sup>30</sup>

Although his vision was becoming clearer, King could never have imagined the way in which his own ministry within a Baptist congregation would develop. In 1954, while still finishing his PhD, he was called to become the minister of the historic Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama. It is not always recognised that this church already had a history of commitment to civil rights. Vernon Johns, who was an early leader of the American Civil Rights Movement, was pastor from 1947 to 1952. In an acceptance statement addressed to Dexter Avenue, King spoke of his own limitations. 'I come to you', he told the church members on 2 May 1954, 'with nothing so special to offer. I have no pretense to being a great preacher or even a profound scholar.' At the same time, King set out what kind of 'beloved community' he wanted to see. His words have a prophetic ring: 'I have felt with Jesus that the spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and to set at liberty those that are bruised.'<sup>31</sup>

Dexter Avenue soon felt the impact of King's leadership. The church membership was divided into small groups with a view to stimulating more active participation.<sup>32</sup> New committees were set up to administer a scholarship fund, promote Christian education, and guide social and political action. A congregational visiting scheme was introduced.<sup>33</sup> These changes were well accepted. The church report in 1955 spoke of increased financial giving, a full-time church secretary having been appointed for the first time, and a successful Daily Vacation Bible School.<sup>34</sup> By the time of the next annual report, Montgomery had been shaken by the public protests against racial discrimination led by King – the one-year-long bus boycott which led to equal treatment for African Americans in the public transport system. Yet King, despite his new and unexpected position as a nationally-

<sup>29</sup> Lischer, *Preacher King*, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> C. Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.2: Rediscovering Precious Values* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> C. Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.6: Advocate of the Social Gospel* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 166-7.

<sup>32</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.2: Rediscovering Precious Values*, p. 287.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 287-94.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 578-9.

known figure, remained a local church pastor. His report spoke of the ‘superb’ work of the church’s Social and Political Action Committee and of higher ‘levels of spiritual development’. As King surveyed the way he had been ‘catapulted into the leadership position of a movement that has now risen to international proportions’, he paid tribute to the congregation’s ‘words of encouragement when I needed them most’.<sup>35</sup> For King, as he put it in 1957, ‘worship at its best is a social experience’, with people from all levels in life coming together to ‘bow before Almighty God’.<sup>36</sup> This was an authentic communal Baptist aspiration.

When McClendon wrote his essay on Martin Luther King he observed that it had not been widely noted up to that point that the focus of the Montgomery movement and of subsequent King campaigns, which took the title the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was the mass meeting, which had all the trappings of a revival meeting – preaching, clapping, singing, cries of ‘amen’ and prayer. Most of the anti-segregationist leaders, such as King and his friend Ralph Abernathy, were ministers. Protesters were mainly Baptists and Methodists. People who were protesting knelt on the streets in groups to pray. Marches were called ‘Prayer Pilgrimages’. Other models for a mass movement might have been found, McClendon argues, and he suggests that one of these might have been the Labour Movement, but the model used was that which was most familiar to Southern African Americans – the church.<sup>37</sup> This aspect of King’s vision is now more widely accepted, but it is important to recognise that the approach he and others took was not simply a matter of pragmatism: King liked to say that ‘the universe bends towards justice’.<sup>38</sup> Within that broader vision, he had a theological understanding of the ‘beloved community’ as a gift of God.

## Preacher King

Having noted the place of the beloved community, another typically Baptist element that was present in King’s thinking was the crucial role played by the pastor. The pastor’s authority, said King as he outlined his hopes for Dexter Avenue, ‘is not merely humanly conferred, but divinely sanctioned’. He maintained that ‘leadership never ascends from the pew to the pulpit, but it invariably descends from the pulpit to the pew’.<sup>39</sup> But this was not a theology of priestly domination. That approach had no place in Baptist

<sup>35</sup> C. Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.3: Birth of a New Age* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 409-412.

<sup>36</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.6: Advocate of the Social Gospel*, p. 297.

<sup>37</sup> McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, pp. 167-8.

<sup>39</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.2: Rediscovering Precious Values*, p. 287.

ecclesiology. Rather, said King in another statement to Dexter Avenue, ‘I come to you with only the claim of being a servant of Christ, and a feeling of dependence on his grace for my leadership. I come with a feeling that I have been called to preach and to lead God’s people. I have felt like Jeremiah, “The word of God is in my heart like burning fire shut up in my bones”. I have felt with Amos that when God speaks who can but prophesy?’<sup>40</sup> This was a classic Baptist understanding of the preaching ministry and it was out of this sense of the ‘prophetic’ that King’s wider political involvement naturally took shape.

This connection is clear in the first public address that King gave when the Montgomery bus boycott began. Speaking to an overflowing crowd at Holt Street Baptist Church, Montgomery, on 3 December 1956, at the First National Institute on Non-Violence and Social Change, the twenty-six-year-old-King delivered a message shot through with the biblical themes that were the common language of the African American Baptist churches and had been since the days of slavery. ‘We, the disinherited of this land’, he announced, ‘we who have been oppressed so long, are tired of going through the long night of captivity’. From that night on, wrote Richard Lischer, ‘King and the black church community forged an interpretative partnership in which they read the Bible, recited it, sang it, performed it, Amen-ed it, and otherwise celebrated the birth of Freedom by its sacred light’.<sup>41</sup> King’s own reflection on the speech places it firmly within the genre of preaching as understood among Baptists. ‘As I sat listening to the continued applause’, said King, ‘I realized that this speech had evoked more response than any speech or sermon I had ever delivered, and yet it was virtually unprepared. I came to see for the first time what the older preachers meant when they said, “Open your mouth and God will speak for you.” … it would always remind me that God can transform man’s weakness into his glorious opportunity.’<sup>42</sup>

Alongside the preaching ministry was a strong pastoral commitment. Indeed it can be argued that it was a sense of pastoral responsibility, specifically the way Rosa Parks was treated by the Montgomery authorities, which drove King to take up the public fight against segregation.<sup>43</sup> In this context King never considered himself to be an invincible warrior for God. Rather he saw himself as a weak human being who continually needed God’s transforming strength and the help of others. Worship services, including celebrations of the Lord’s Supper and baptisms, were truly communal events. Speaking to the Dexter Avenue

<sup>40</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.6: Advocate of the Social Gospel*, pp. 166-7.

<sup>41</sup> Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 198.

<sup>42</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> I am indebted to Keith Jones, the Rector of IBTS, for this thought.

church in 1956, however, he regretted the ways in which his many new responsibilities had adversely affected his pastoral duties.<sup>44</sup> His pastoral work and his preaching ministry were of equal importance. Two years later, he related to the congregation how he had experienced the brutality of police officers, an unwarranted arrest, and a near fatal stab wound by a mentally deranged woman: these things, he said, have ‘poured upon me like staggering torrents on a cold wintry day’.<sup>45</sup> Eventually the pressures proved too great. In 1959 he resigned from Dexter Avenue. He described how five years before he had accepted the pastorate and how as a congregation ‘(w)e started out at that moment on a great and creative spiritual venture’.<sup>46</sup> In some ways this venture was only partially successful, at least as far as Dexter Avenue was concerned, since ultimately they could not cope with having a pastor who was away more often than present. However, King’s commitment to rootedness in a local church ministry meant that he did not take a role outside a local church, but instead moved to Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, to work alongside his father.

At Ebenezer, King Jr. was far from a passive ministerial assistant to King Sr. Rather, he proposed to Ebenezer many of the same innovations as he had seen working effectively at Dexter Avenue. One new venture not introduced at Dexter Avenue, which he added at Ebenezer, was a Credit Union, to help with the many financial difficulties people in the congregation experienced. He also set up classes in Christian doctrine, commenting on the tragedy that ‘the average member of a Baptist Church has no conception of the doctrines of his faith’.<sup>47</sup> King was pastorally involved with the congregation, but, as at Dexter Avenue, he was aware of a calling which did not come from them. Speaking at Ebenezer on 5 June 1966 he emphasised again the prophetic nature of his understanding of ministry: ‘No member of Ebenezer Baptist Church called me to the ministry. (*No, sir*) You called me to Ebenezer, and you may turn me out of here, but you can’t turn me out of the ministry, because I got my guidelines and my anointment from God Almighty... The word of God is upon me like *fire* shut up in my bones, (*Yes, That’s right*) and when God’s word gets upon me, I’ve got to say it, I’ve got to tell it all over everywhere. [shouting] (*Yes*) And God has called me (*Yes*) to deliver those that are in captivity. (*Yes, sir*)’.<sup>48</sup> Near the end of his life, King, evidently struggling inwardly, told the Ebenezer congregation: ‘I’ve felt sin-breakers dashing, trying to

<sup>44</sup> C. Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol .3: Birth of a New Age*, p. 411.

<sup>45</sup> C. Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.4: Symbol of the Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 538.

<sup>46</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.5: Threshold of a New Decade*, p. 328.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 377-380.

<sup>48</sup> M.L. King, ‘Guidelines for a Constructive Church’, in C. Carson and P. Holloran, eds., *A Knock at Midnight* (New York: Warner Books, 2000), pp. 110-111.

conquer my soul. But I heard the voice of Jesus, saying still to fight on.<sup>49</sup> Charles Marsh speaks of how King's preaching invested concepts like the beloved community with 'theological vitality and prophetic urgency', creating pictures of 'God's crashing into the human – a sudden and new social reality appearing quite paradoxically on the streets of Montgomery and Birmingham and Jackson'.<sup>50</sup>

The Birmingham, Alabama, campaign and the massive march on Washington, DC, in 1963 highlighted even more dramatically the prophetic role of King – as a preacher to the nation. During the struggle in Birmingham, Alabama, King, together with his colleague Ralph Abernathy, was jailed, and from the prison he wrote – and had smuggled out on pieces of paper – his famous 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'. An important part of this letter is the way that King refers to his presence in Birmingham. He was there as an 'outsider', like the prophet Amos, and was preaching the same message as Amos – against injustice. He was also a preacher of the gospel, like Paul, and he felt the same compulsion that Paul felt in his preaching. King was, in his own words, 'compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my home town'.<sup>51</sup> King took the Baptist heritage of preaching, expressed it in African American form, and transferred it from the ecclesial to the national setting.

## The ideals of the Bible

The pictures that King painted and the themes he expounded were primarily drawn from the Bible. His earliest known recorded sermon, 'Rediscovering Lost Values' was delivered to the large Second Baptist Church in the city of Detroit in 1954, a few weeks before his PhD dissertation outline was approved. This was a period when King was exploring new theological ideas, but his sermon was charged with African American Baptist spirituality. Drawing from Psalm 23, King concluded his message by speaking of God 'who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death, and causes us to fear no evil', and who, as familiar hymns have put it, 'has been our help in ages past, and our hope for years to come, and our shelter in the time of storm, and our eternal home'.<sup>52</sup> For King the message of the Bible was first of all a message about God. Preaching at Dexter Avenue after a visit he had made to Europe, he mused on 'the exploitation perpetuated by the British Empire', exploitation which had

<sup>49</sup> M. L. King, 'Unfulfilled Dreams', in Carson and Holloran, eds., *A Knock at Midnight*, p. 199.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Marsh, 'The Civil Rights Movement as Theological Drama – Interpretation and Application', *Modern Theology*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (April 2002), p. 240.

<sup>51</sup> 'Letter from Birmingham Jail, 16 April 1963', in M.L. King, *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Penguin, 1963), p. 77; McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, p. 57.

<sup>52</sup> Carson, 'Martin Luther King, Jr., and the African-American Social Gospel', pp. 356-7.

been sanctioned by the Church of England. He then directed the congregation to God, using often-quoted words from Psalm 46: ‘Be still and know that I am God’. The power of Britain, he pronounced, ‘is no more’.<sup>53</sup> His message directed people to look to God, not to human power.

One of King’s favourite sermons, which he often preached from 1954 onwards, proclaimed his traditional Baptist belief that the God of the Bible was to be seen as a friend. The sermon was ‘The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life’. In the 1960s he explicitly used this sermon to combat the ‘God is dead’ theology which was current at the time. ‘You may not be able to define God in philosophical terms’, said King. ‘Men through the ages have tried to talk about him. (Yes) Plato said that he was the Architectonic Good. Aristotle called him the Unmoved Mover. Hegel called him the Absolute Whole. Then there was a man named Paul Tillich who called him Being-Itself. We don’t need to know all of these high-sounding terms....One day you ought to rise up and say, “I know him because he’s a lily of the valley”. (Yes) He’s a bright and morning star. (Yes) He’s a rose of Sharon.... “He’s my everything. He’s my mother and my father. He’s my sister and my brother. He’s a friend to the friendless.” This is the God of the universe. And if you believe in him and worship him, something will happen in your life.’<sup>54</sup> Part of the Black preaching style was the use of phrases that evoked responses, but there is no reason to think that King was using these statements to manipulate his audience while not personally believing in their content. King’s God was not ‘Being-Itself’ but was actually ‘a friend to the friendless’.

King found much helpful imagery in the Old Testament. Addressing 2,000 marchers gathering to march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965, King spoke about going to the ‘Promised Land’. He saw the ‘Pharaohs of the South’ as those who were at risk of their armies being drowned if they did not let the Black people of the South go free. King’s historic final speech, with its words ‘I’ve been on the mountaintop’, similarly drew from Old Testament language, with its echoes of Moses drawing close to God.<sup>55</sup> Yet this language was not ‘dreamed up’ for great occasions. In his annual report to the Dexter Avenue congregation in which he looked forward to the year 1956-57, King spoke about the ‘long, long way to go’, the ‘gigantic spiritual mountains that we have not climbed’, and the church as ‘an ever flowing river’, all images which had connections with biblical

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<sup>53</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.4: Symbol of the Movement*, p. 165.

<sup>54</sup> M.L. King, ‘The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life’, in Carson and Holloran, eds., *A Knock at Midnight*, pp. 138-9. The 1960 sermon is in Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.6: Advocate of the Social Gospel*, pp. 395-405.

<sup>55</sup> McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, pp. 64-5. For Selma see David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

stories.<sup>56</sup> King was not simply a Black militant looking for ways to bring about an end to injustice. Rather, as McClendon puts it, for this Baptist leader (King) the God of the Old Testament was one who called humanity to act, and who acted himself in history.<sup>57</sup>

God was also, according to the New Testament, revealed in Jesus Christ. At Morehouse, one of King's teachers was George D. Kelsey, a Morehouse graduate who had recently received his doctorate from Yale. Kelsey commented later: 'I made it my business to present lectures on the most strenuous teaching of Jesus' and added that 'Martin's eyes lit up'.<sup>58</sup> In particular King stressed Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. King was indebted to A.J. Muste, a leading American pacifist who drew from the Quaker and mystical traditions. Although King never became an absolute pacifist he affirmed Muste's approach: 'As far as reading is concerned, what undoubtedly influenced me....to conclude that I could not "bend" the Sermon on the Mount and the whole concept of the Cross and suffering love to accommodate participation in war, was the serious reading of the Christian mystics.'<sup>59</sup> Lerone Bennett suggested that in King there was a 'deep strain of mysticism'.<sup>60</sup> However, King's experience was always profoundly rooted in the Gospels and was expressed in concrete ways. In his famous 1961 sermon, 'Loving Your Enemies', published in his book, *Strength to Love*, King spoke of the need for unconditional love in the struggle to see the reality of the beloved community.<sup>61</sup> Here was the heart of King's spirituality.<sup>62</sup> In another sermon, 'Facing the challenge of a new age', he called for a return to Jesus' teaching in the New Testament: 'There is still a voice crying out in terms that echo across the generations, saying: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you".'<sup>63</sup>

In his book on the ethics of King, Ervin Smith stated: 'Perhaps no other American has spoken with such eloquence the moral ideals of the Bible'. King's agenda was, however, not that of the Moral Majority

<sup>56</sup> Papers, Vol 3 Birth of a New Age 1997, pp. 409-412.

<sup>57</sup> McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*, p. 65.

<sup>58</sup> Carson, 'Martin Luther King, Jr., and the African-American Social Gospel', p. 348.

<sup>59</sup> Staughton Lynd, 'A.J. Muste', in M.J. Buhle, P. Buhle and H.J. Haye, eds., *The American Radical*, (New York, Routledge, 1994), p. 262.

<sup>60</sup> Lerone Bennett, *What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Chicago: John Publishing, 1964), p. 193.

<sup>61</sup> M.L. King, 'Loving your enemies', in *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 54. This was preached in 1961: see Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.6: Advocate of the Social Gospel*, pp. 421-29.

<sup>62</sup> See Glenn Hinson, 'Baptist Spirituality', *Baptist Studies Bulletin* (May 2003). Online: [www.mercer.edu/baptiststudies//bulletin/may03](http://www.mercer.edu/baptiststudies//bulletin/may03).

<sup>63</sup> M.L. King, 'Facing the challenge of a new age', in J.M. Washington, ed., *I have a Dream* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986), pp. 21-2. See Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.3: Birth of a New Age*, p. 458.

movement, with its tendency to focus on issues connected with the individual. Instead King attacked the societal evils of racism, poverty and militarism.<sup>64</sup> Yet the conclusion should not be drawn that King's major concern was to use the teaching of Jesus to spur people on to greater moral effort. Rather, in line with his Baptist theological tradition, it was in the life and death of Jesus that he found hope. An Easter sermon he preached in 1957 was typical. He was addressing injustice, and the message of the Cross gave him plenty to say about this. But then he continued: 'And I can hear something saying, "King, you are stopping at Good Friday, but don't you know that Easter is coming? (Yeah) Don't worry about this thing....I want you to know, King, that Easter is coming! One day truth will rise up and reign supreme! (Yeah) One day justice will rise up.'<sup>65</sup> As Marsh puts it, the beloved community was 'the new social space of the Church', and in that space the 'triumph and beat of the drums of Easter' could be heard. This community was established by the '*great event on Calvary*', as King exclaimed in his sermon, '*Paul's Letter to American Christians*'.<sup>66</sup> This stress on the power of what Christ has done was a characteristic emphasis in Baptist soteriology.

## A Personal God

As well as giving priority to the community, to preaching and to the teaching of the New Testament, Baptist spirituality has also called people to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Writing in 1960, King spoke about how he had become 'more and more convinced of the reality of a personal God'. This had always been his belief, but now it was, he insisted, 'a living reality which has been validated in the experiences of everyday life'.<sup>67</sup> But King could also approve of the statement: 'A religion that ends with the individual, ends.' Referring back to his reading of Rauschenbusch, he argued that 'any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried'.<sup>68</sup> It was Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis* that gave him a basis for his commitment to social freedom and racial justice, but he was not prepared to follow

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<sup>64</sup> Ervin Smith, *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), pp. 158-9.

<sup>65</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol.6: Advocate of the Social Gospel*, p. 289.

<sup>66</sup> Marsh, 'The Civil Rights Movement as Theological Drama', p. 243.

<sup>67</sup> M.L. King, 'Pilgrimage to Nonviolence', in Washington, ed., *I have a Dream*, p. 61. See Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol.5: Threshold of a New Decade*, pp. 419-25.

<sup>68</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 91.

Rauschenbusch in lauding American democracy and capitalism.<sup>69</sup> For King the dignity of the individual had its roots in theology, specifically in Protestant theology. He believed that the Reformation doctrine of human nature over-stressed the corruption of humanity but he affirmed ‘justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers’ as ‘towering principles which we as Protestants must forever affirm’.<sup>70</sup>

But Baptists went further than some other Protestants in their stress on a deep and growing personal relationship of a believer with God. King testified to this, and to the reality of prayer, most often through his account of his ‘kitchen experience’. It was at a time, during the Montgomery bus boycott, when he felt: ‘I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left’.<sup>71</sup> King had been receiving telephone calls, sometimes more than forty a day, threatening his life and the life of his family. For a time he was bold, but as he described it years later, preaching in 1967 in Mount Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church, Chicago, one night it became too much. ‘It was around midnight.... the telephone started ringing and I picked it up. On the other end was an ugly voice... “Nigger, we are tired of you and your mess now. And if you aren’t out of this town in three days, we’re going to blow your brains out and blow up your house”.’ King couldn’t sleep and went to the kitchen to have some coffee. At that moment he found little comfort in philosophical discourse about the reality of evil. He told the Mount Pisgah congregation that he ‘bowed down over that cup of coffee...And oh yes, I prayed a prayer and I prayed out loud that night. (Yes)...Lord, I must confess that I’m weak now; I’m faltering; I’m losing my courage. (Yes) And I can’t let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak. And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, (Yes) “Martin Luther, (Yes) stand up for righteousness, (Yes) stand up for justice, (Yes) stand up for truth. (Yes) And lo I will be with you, (Yes) even until the end of the world.”.... He promised never to leave me, (Never) never to leave me alone.’<sup>72</sup>

The use of the name ‘Martin Luther’ is significant. King saw himself as an individual called by God, as had been the sixteenth-century Reformer. In 1934 King Sr. had attended a Baptist World Alliance Congress in Berlin and on his return from Germany he changed his own name from Michael

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>70</sup> M.L. King, ‘The answer to a perplexing question’, in *Strength to Love*, pp. 130-1. See also Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.2: Rediscovering Precious Values*, p. 190.

<sup>71</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 134-5.

<sup>72</sup> M.L. King, ‘Why Jesus called a Man a Fool’, in Carson and Holloran, eds., *A Knock at Midnight*, pp. 159-63.

King to Martin Luther King. His son's name was similarly changed.<sup>73</sup> King Jr. not only accepted the mantle of a reformer but identified himself as a spiritual and political revolutionary. King's strategies have often been analysed in terms of their indebtedness to Gandhi, and that is valid, but King himself saw the 'Gospel of Jesus' as primary.<sup>74</sup> Indeed when King was labelled an extremist he retorted that Jesus was 'an extremist for love' when he said: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you'. Was not Amos, he continued, an extremist for justice, and Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Martin Luther – with his words 'Here I stand; I can do none other so help me God' - an extremist? To this list King added John Bunyan, the seventeenth-century Baptist who was imprisoned for his beliefs, and Abraham Lincoln, who stated 'This nation cannot survive half slave and half free'.<sup>75</sup>

Although King could criticise some strands of Protestantism for producing 'a purely other-worldly religion' with a stress only on the soul,<sup>76</sup> he saw his work as a Baptist minister as having at its core the call to people to come to Christ for salvation from sin. Thus he urged Dexter Avenue to think about 'unchurched persons in the community who are desperately in need of Christ' and to embark on 'a serious evangelistic campaign'.<sup>77</sup> In 1957 King was invited to lead in prayer at a huge Billy Graham mission in New York and he later wrote to Graham saying that this had been 'one of the high points of my life'. He applauded Graham for his significant evangelistic work and 'the stand you have taken in the area of race relations', suggesting that Graham had opportunities to influence this area 'almost above any person we can point to'.<sup>78</sup> King himself issued the same 'altar calls' as Graham. Preaching at Dexter Avenue in 1957 he asked: 'Who this morning will accept the Christ...Now is the time to make the decision'.<sup>79</sup>

King's meetings, in typical Baptist fashion, were also full of songs, many of them stressing fellowship with God. 'What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms' was often sung at mass meetings led by King.<sup>80</sup> Among King's favourite songs were 'His eye is on the sparrow' and 'He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone',

<sup>73</sup> Lischer, *Preacher King*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>74</sup> David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1988), p. 75, cited by Marsh, 'The Civil Rights Movement as Theological Drama', p. 242.

<sup>75</sup> 'Letter from Birmingham Jail, 16 April 1963', in King, *Why We Can't Wait*, p. 88.

<sup>76</sup> M.L. King, 'The answer to a perplexing question', pp. 130-1. See also Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol.2: Rediscovering Precious Values*, pp. 190-1.

<sup>77</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol 3: Birth of a New Age*, p. 412.

<sup>78</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol 4: Symbol of the Movement*, p. 265.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>80</sup> Lischer, *Preacher King*, pp. 244-5.

both highly personal in their sentiments.<sup>81</sup> The hymns chosen for King's funeral, reflecting the music that was important to him, included 'Precious Lord, take my hand', 'Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling', and 'There is a balm in Gilead'.<sup>82</sup> These songs were part of his every-day spiritual experience. Seeing a rock could inspire King to sing 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me; let me hide myself in thee'. As Douglas Weaver puts it in his essay on King's spirituality, such incidents show how King consistently acknowledged his dependence upon, and intimacy with, a personal Creator.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

Much work has been done on Martin Luther King Jr. as a civil rights leader, a thinker, a social educator, an orator and an African American community leader. Among Baptists, however, he is also honoured as our community's most outstanding twentieth-century spokesperson in the area of action on behalf of justice.<sup>84</sup> Very little has been done that explores King's specifically Baptist convictions. Yet King viewed himself first of all as a minister, a preacher called of God, standing in a tradition of prophetic Baptist pastors.<sup>85</sup> King's life was deeply rooted in a Baptist congregation, Ebenezer, Atlanta, and this led to his espousing the core Baptist conviction that the basic unit of Christian commitment is the congregation. The power of Christ is in the church.<sup>86</sup> Here is the beloved community. It was in communities such as Ebenezer and Dexter Avenue that King found his identity. He was a preacher who was called to leadership, but he believed that both he and the communities he led could only fulfil their mission as they focused on God. In the typical language of the African American Baptist congregations, King called the congregation at Ebenezer to 'be sure that you have a strong boat of faith' anchored in God. Faith, he insisted, would sustain them during the 'storms of disappointment' and the 'anguishes of life'.<sup>87</sup> This faith, in time of pressure, gave King a 'triumphant' peace.<sup>88</sup> The God revealed in Jesus Christ, whose life and death were normative, was actually present in the community. It was this that provided the strength to love the enemies, even those who were vicious

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 172, 175-6.

<sup>82</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 330, 350-1.

<sup>83</sup> C. Douglas Weaver, 'The Spirituality of Martin Luther King Jr.', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 2004), p. 58.

<sup>84</sup> Hewitt, 'Mining the Baptist Tradition for Christian Ethics: Some Gems', p. 77.

<sup>85</sup> Weaver, 'The Spirituality of Martin Luther King Jr.', p. 57.

<sup>86</sup> Lischer, *Preacher King*, p. 74.

<sup>87</sup> King, 'Unfulfilled Dreams', p. 199.

<sup>88</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, 'Remembering Martin Luther King, Jr.', *First Things*, October 2002, p. 100.

in their hatred. As King left Dexter Avenue, and as tributes were paid to him, King's own emphasis in response was on the presence of God, on prayer and on how he had 'felt His power working in my life'.<sup>89</sup> This personal God of the Baptist tradition, and in particular a God present to the slaves amid their suffering, was the experiential anchor for King's remarkable achievements.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr, Vol.5: Threshold of a New Decade*, p. 355.

<sup>90</sup> Weaver, 'The Spirituality of Martin Luther King Jr.', p 57.

## Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament

### **Abstract**

*The issue of death and afterlife in the Old Testament is complex; until recently, however, there was a partial consensus – emphasising, particularly, that the Old Testament shows little interest in life after death, with the general prospect only of a shadowy and unwelcome existence in Sheol; and that the idea of resurrection, found in Daniel 12:1-3, was a late innovation, drawing primarily of foreign influences and with no significant Old Testament antecedents. More recently that consensus has been challenged by the likes of Jon D. Levenson. This article seeks to evaluate some of the more recent contributions to the debate and to consider whether they present a viable alternative to the conventional wisdom in this area. In particular it notes a growing consensus that Sheol is not to be seen as the final destiny of all the dead (though there is no clear view of an alternative) and that final resurrection is not a foreign import, but the articulation of an idea already present, in embryo, in the earlier Old Testament faith.*

In common with the beliefs of other cultures in the Ancient Near East, death in the Old Testament is viewed as inevitable and natural. So, at the end of their lives both Joshua and David announce, *I am about to go the way of all the earth* (Josh. 23:14; 1 Kgs 2:2; cf. 2 Sam. 14:14; Job 7:9; Eccl. 3:1–2).<sup>1</sup> Even so, the attitude of the Old Testament towards death is generally negative (e.g. Ps. 6:5; 55:4; Eccl. 9:4; Ezek. 18:32). Death is a frequently hostile and an almost always unwelcome reality.<sup>2</sup> Because of its inevitability death was accepted when it came at the end of a long and fulfilled life. Abraham (Gen. 15:15; 25:8), Gideon (Judg. 8:32) and David (1 Chr. 29:28) died at a *good old age*. By contrast, premature or violent death was unnatural; so, for example, those involved in Korah's rebellion were denied a natural death because of their sin (Num. 16:29–30); David did not want Joab to die naturally because of his violence (1 Kgs 2:6); and Hezekiah prayed to be spared an early death (2 Kgs 20:1–3).

What is less clear is what the Old Testament has to say about life beyond the grave. Much of the discussion of afterlife in the Old Testament

<sup>1</sup> The inevitability of death is seen, too, in the Gilgamesh Epic: ‘when the gods created humankind, they made death the lot of humankind. Life, they retained in their own hands’ (*ANET*, p. 90).

<sup>2</sup> Job presents a more positive aspect of death as a place where the weary are at rest and slaves are free (Job 3:11–19). However, this needs to be seen against the background of his own situation: death is a release from suffering.

focuses on two main, interrelated, areas: the prospect of final resurrection and the question of what happened immediately after death.

It is a common view among scholars that the idea of resurrection was a relatively late development in Old Testament theology – found in the Old Testament only in Daniel 12:1-3, which is generally dated in the second century BC. Furthermore, the double resurrection in this text, of the *multitudes who sleep in the dust*, either *to everlasting life or to shame and everlasting contempt*, has been widely thought to be an innovation – prompted by the need to offer hope to the righteous dead during a time of intense persecution (and so vindicate God's justice) and influenced by the eschatological expectations associated with Zoroastrianism. For some scholars this is something totally new, with no antecedents within the earlier faith of the Old Testament. Robert Martin-Achard is among those who point to the important contribution that foreign ideas have made to the final development of the doctrine.<sup>3</sup> However, he notes, too, that ‘the determinative factor came from Israel itself, from its faith in the Living God as He revealed Himself, little by little, to his own’.<sup>4</sup> These outside influences were not *sufficient* to account for the belief. Nevertheless, foreign ideas, particularly Zoroastrianism which Israel encountered at a significant juncture, were *necessary* to enable the doctrine to emerge – again suggesting some degree of discontinuity with the earlier Old Testament view.

That earlier view is widely thought to emphasise the centrality of a bodily existence in this world and so, at least officially, expresses little or no interest in the world of the dead.<sup>5</sup> Human personality was thought of as a unity, made up, primarily, of flesh animated by the spirit or breath (*ruach*) of God. When God withdrew his *ruach*, life ended and the body returned to the dust (Job 34:14–15; Ps. 104:29; 146:4; Eccl. 12:7). As such, the human personality has no immortal component corresponding to the Christian idea of the ‘soul’. That is not to say the dead in the Old Testament ceased to exist. Eichrodt suggests that, at death, ‘a shadowy image of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Robert Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life: a Study of the Development of the Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh/London: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), pp. 186-205. Martin-Achard notes both Iranian (Zoroastrian) and Canaanite influences; see further below. On suggested foreign influences, see also, Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986), pp. 45-54.

<sup>4</sup> Martin-Achard, *Death to Life*, p. 205.

<sup>5</sup> A different view is represented by Dahood who notes a number of Old Testament texts that, in his view, point to resurrection and immortality; see, e.g., M. Dahood, *Psalms*, 3 volumes (Anchor Bible 16-17A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966-1970). However, this is done sometimes by offering philologically possible translations of words and expressions that do not take the prevailing theological context into account; see, e.g., Bruce Vawter, ‘Intimations of Immortality and the Old Testament’, *JBL* 91 (1972), pp. 158-171; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, p. 284.

dead person detached itself from him and continued to eke out a bare existence'; though, as he goes on to say, 'we only confuse the idea if we mix it up with our own idea of the soul ... What survives ... is not part of the living man, but a shadowy image of the whole man'.<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew term, *nephesh*, is frequently translated 'soul'. However, *nephesh* was probably originally linked with 'breath' and is better taken to refer to the life of the whole person:<sup>7</sup> what a person *is* rather than something he or she possesses. This is something we will return to.

The place associated with the dead in the Old Testament is Sheol, which was thought to be situated in the lowest parts of the earth. There are frequent references to going *down* to Sheol (e.g. Gen. 37:35; Job 7:9; Isa. 14:15); it is described as being in the *depths* (Ps. 86:13; Prov. 9:18; Jon 2:2); and is presented as the antithesis to heaven (Job 11:8; Ps. 139:8; Isa. 7:11; Amos 9:2). References to decay (Ps. 16:10), worms and maggots (Job 24:19–20; Isa. 14:11) suggest a link with the grave – and the NIV translates *sheol* as 'grave' in fifty-seven of its sixty-six occurrences; though the term more generally indicates the underworld.<sup>8</sup> As such, Sheol is traditionally understood as the destination of all the dead, good and bad alike. So, for example, Martin-Achard draws a distinction between Sheol and Gehenna, which is associated with punishment, and notes regarding Sheol that 'all the dead are in it'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, John Gray, commenting on 1 Kings 2:6, describes Sheol as 'the shadowy, insubstantial underworld, the destination of all, good or bad without distinction'.<sup>10</sup> The picture of Sheol is generally negative. The dead in Sheol are weak (Isa. 14:10). They are separated from God and not able to worship him (e.g. Isa. 38:18; Ps. 6:5). Sheol is further characterised as a place where there is no reward, and no knowledge or wisdom (Eccl. 9:10); and from which there is no return (Job 7:9; cf. 2 Sam. 12:23; Isa. 26:13–14). As such, Sheol is unwelcome and threatening. It

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1961–1967), 2:214.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel C. Fredericks suggests that *nephesh* initially meant 'breath', and so was linked also with 'life' – and thence came to refer to the whole person (*NIDOTTE* 3:133); see also Eichrodt, 2:134–142; H. Seebass, *TDOT* 9:497–519; Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: the Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 111–112.

<sup>8</sup> R. Laird Harris, 'The Meaning of the Word Sheol as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Texts', *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 4.4 (1961), pp. 129–135, claims that *sheol* only means 'grave'. His arguments, though, are not always convincing, particularly in relation to *sheol* as a cosmological extremity (Deut. 32:22; Job 11:8; Psa. 139:8; Amos 9:2); see Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos / Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2002), pp. 73–75. According to Eugene H. Merrill, *sheol* 'designates both the grave and the netherworld, particularly the latter' (*NIDOTTE* 4:6–7 [6]); see also L. Wächter, *TDOT* 14:239–248 [241–242]. Martin-Achard suggests that the underworld was viewed as 'a sort of vast grave of which the individual tombs are merely particular manifestations' (*Death to Life*, p. 38).

<sup>9</sup> Martin-Achard, *Death to Life*, pp. 39–40.

<sup>10</sup> John Gray, *1 and 2 Kings* (3<sup>rd</sup> revised edn; London: SCM, 1977), p. 102. For a survey of less recent views see also Spronk, *Beautific Afterlife*, pp. 66–70.

does not offer hope for life after death or a basis for continued fellowship with God; and it is easy to see why an alternative view of the destination of the dead – particularly of faithful Jewish martyrs – was deemed desirable. And at the same time, the idea of an eschatological corporeal resurrection fitted well with the view of the individual as a psychosomatic unity.

Recent approaches to afterlife in the Old Testament question aspects of this traditional understanding. Philip Johnston's *Shades of Sheol*, published in 2002, set down important markers. A further significant contribution to this ongoing debate is Jon Levenson's book, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, published in 2006. Levenson raises objections to what he sees as the scholarly consensus.<sup>11</sup> A central contention is that the idea of resurrection was not a primarily foreign innovation dating from the second Temple period, introduced to resolve an embarrassing theological crisis. He also challenges the view that, in the earlier period, Sheol was seen as the ultimate destination of all those who die. The possibility of an alternative to Sheol is also explored by Stephen Cook in his 2007 article, 'Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel'.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of this paper is to review and evaluate some of the recent challenges to the traditional 'consensus', and to discuss the current debate within Old Testament scholarship, particularly in the areas noted already: the Old Testament view of Sheol and immortality, and the hope of final (eschatological) resurrection.

With regard to final resurrection, there is a partial consensus emerging. It is generally agreed that Daniel 12:1-3 gives the first clear articulation of the doctrine of double resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous;<sup>13</sup> and that this reflects a relatively late stage in Israel's

<sup>11</sup> Levenson summarises what he considers to be the consensus view: that resurrection of the dead has no early roots or sources in the Hebrew Bible; that death is an unproblematic part of God's plan with nothing to transcend it, that involves descent into Sheol with no hope of return; and that the alternative does not appear until the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period – prompted by the scandal of martyrdom and influenced by Zoroastrianism. Thus resurrection is unprecedented in the Hebrew Bible, is a foreign import and was devised to solve a theological crisis (*Resurrection*, pp. xi-xii).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen L. Cook, 'Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel', *Religion Compass* 1.6 (2007), pp. 660-683.

<sup>13</sup> Some commentators argue that Job 19:25-27 points to resurrection and post-mortem vindication; e.g., Francis I. Andersen, *Job* (TOTC; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1976), pp. 193-194; Robert S. Fyall, *Now my Eyes have seen You: Images of Creation in the Book of Job* (NSBT 12; Leicester: Apollos/Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), pp. 49-52; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; London: SCM, 1985), p. 293; Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity / Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), p. 69; see also Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 310-315. For the opposing view see, e.g., David J.A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), pp. 455-466; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 295-297; Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 209-214. The text is problematic, making any firm assertion difficult; however, other passages in the book point to the traditional view of Sheol as a land of darkness from which there is no return (Job 7:9; 10:21-22; 16:22) – and offering no hope of vindication. In his present plight Job seems to be in no doubt that he will end up in Sheol; so any vindication must come before he dies. The

theological development. It thus comes as something new. However, as Levenson also shows, the way for the idea was well prepared in earlier Old Testament texts, and ‘reflects key features of the deep structure of the theology of pre-exilic Israel’.<sup>14</sup> As noted, the idea of resurrection has been widely held to be a foreign import – with influences drawn, particularly, from Canaan and Persia. The Canaanite belief of the dying and rising of the god Baal would have been known in Israel from the time of the settlement, though it seems to have been officially resisted. A similar idea is found in Mesopotamia, with the dying and rising of Tammuz/Dumuzi;<sup>15</sup> and the need to condemn weeping over Tammuz in the Temple suggests that this did have some impact in Israel.<sup>16</sup> While this may suggest a more official acceptance, it is nevertheless not endorsed by the Old Testament writers. The dying-rising god motif is associated with fertility and the cycle of nature – and Mowinckel saw aspects of this reflected in an annual ‘Enthronement Festival’ in Israel.<sup>17</sup> The debate about the existence and certainly the significance of such a festival is no longer current. But might the motif have influenced Israel’s thinking about resurrection? So, for example, some see allusions to Tammuz in the death and possible resurrection of the Servant of the LORD in the fourth Servant Song.<sup>18</sup> According to Martin-Achard these older influences may have helped towards the final emergence of the doctrine of resurrection; though he suggests that the Iranian/Persian influence was more significant.<sup>19</sup> Eichrodt also notes the possibility of Persian influence – but concludes that

expression *when I awake* in Ps. 17:15 is also sometimes taken to refer to waking from the sleep of death (as in Dan. 12:2); see, e.g., Kidner, *Psalm 1-72* (TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1973), pp. 89–90. It seems more likely, though, that the psalmist is contemplating these things at night (v. 3) and trusts that things will be different in the morning; see, e.g., Craigie, *Psalm 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco, TX: Word, 1983), pp. 164–165; Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 206–207.

<sup>14</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection*, p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> Dumuzi is the Sumerian name; Tammuz its Akkadian equivalent. According to Stephanie Dalley, *The Descent of Innana to the Underworld*, the (older and longer) Sumerian version of the Akkadian myth, *The Descent of Ishtar*, ‘shows clearly that Dumuzi periodically died and rose, causing seasonal fertility’ (*The Context of Scripture*, ed. by William H. Hallo, 3 volumes [Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002], 1:381).

<sup>16</sup> Ezek. 8:14.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 2 volumes (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 1:130–140. However, whilst recognising particularly Canaanite influence, Mowinckel argues that in its application to Yahweh the myth had to be substantially altered; the idea the god’s death and resurrection ‘was wholly incompatible with Yahweh’s essential character and ... therefore had to disappear’ (*ibid.* p. 136); see also, *idem*, *He That Cometh* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), pp. 81–87. Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) notes parallels between Baal and Yahweh (see especially pp. 41–79) though points out that the idea of Baal as a dying God is one of the features that is ‘conspicuously absent from ... the biblical record’ (p. 164).

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, pp. 234–236, 453–459; Christopher R. North, *The Suffering in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 69–71; *idem*, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and Commentary to Chapters XL-LV* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 236–237, 242.

<sup>19</sup> Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, pp. 186–205.

'divergences between Persian and Jewish resurrection beliefs are too great to make mutual influence possible'.<sup>20</sup> John Day argues for a predominantly Canaanite influence.<sup>21</sup> He claims that Hosea 13:14 has demythologised imagery that echoes the dying and rising of Baal to apply it to the exile and restoration of Israel. Hosea 6:2-3 is also thought to have parallels with Baal's three day journey from the underworld. According to Day these texts have, in turn, influenced Isaiah 26:19; and this last text, which again refers to the resurrection of the nation after the death of the exile, has been re-mythologised, and reinterpreted in Daniel 12:2 in the context of literal resurrection from the dead.<sup>22</sup> There are several occasions where Old Testament writers use imagery drawn from the Baal myths, and this may well be another. However, as in all such cases, while the Canaanite (and maybe Mesopotamian) myths may have helped to supply the *language* and *imagery* of death and resurrection, the theological content and application is original. Thus, when the belief in resurrection emerged, it was, as Johnston describes it: 'distinctively Israelite'.<sup>23</sup>

Levenson notes several biblical passages that are steps along the way to the statement in Daniel 12:1-3 – including the bringing of life to dry bones in Ezekiel 37.<sup>24</sup> While this refers to the restoration of the nation, and 'does not attest to the expectation of resurrection in the later sense',<sup>25</sup> Levenson nevertheless sees the metaphor as significant – presenting Israel's future hope in terms of the 'resurrection of those long dead'.<sup>26</sup> He further points to three key biblical antecedents to the Daniel text. One is the fourth Servant Song (Isa. 52:13-53:12). In Daniel 12:3, those who will experience resurrection are described as 'the wise'; and that same group will 'lead many to righteousness'. God's Servant is also described as 'wise' (Isa. 52:13), and he, too, will cause many to be righteous (v. 11). There is also the implication that the Servant is raised from the dead – that after

<sup>20</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:516; see also Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 234-236; Levenson, *Resurrection*, pp. 157-158; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 57-59.

<sup>21</sup> Spronk (*Beatific Afterlife*) also sees a Canaanite background to resurrection belief in Israel. This was at first resisted, but emerges in the later ideas of resurrection.

<sup>22</sup> See John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTS 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Day notes several points of contact between the Old Testament and Canaanite gods of the underworld, notably Mot, Resheph and Molech (pp. 185-208). Whilst it is possible that the personification of plague (e.g. Habb. 3:5; Ps. 78:48-49 cf. 91:5-6) may have links with Resheph, there is no suggestion of dependence on Canaanite theology.

<sup>23</sup> Johnston, *Shades*, p. 237; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, p. 343. Cook also argues that, in the idea which surfaced in Dan. 12:1-3, 'deep currents within Israelite tradition flowed together and poured forth in an explicit expectation of eschatological resurrection' ('Funerary Practices', p. 669).

<sup>24</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection*, pp. 156-165; see also Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 293-297; cf. Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 222-224. Levenson also notes Isa. 25:8; 66:22-24; and points to several instances of resuscitation, including 2 Kgs 4:8-37.

<sup>25</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection*, p. 163.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

being ‘cut off from the land of the living’ (v. 8), ‘he will see his offspring and prolong his days’ (v. 10; cf. v. 11). Thus, in Levenson’s view, ‘the “wise” [in Dan. 12:2] have taken on the identity of the servant, afflicted and mocked in life, vindicated and exalted after death’.<sup>27</sup> Another important antecedent is Isaiah 26:19, which, like Daniel 12:2, refers to resurrection from the dust. This is frequently applied to the resurrection of the nation, which contrasts with the shades of Israel’s former oppressors who ‘do not rise’ (Isa. 26:14); though it may refer to individual members of the nation.<sup>28</sup> Both of these texts anticipate Daniel’s fuller statement of individual resurrection. Levenson notes, however, that these anticipatory texts are themselves regarded as late. In order to demonstrate that the idea of resurrection has earlier antecedents he, like Day, points out the close relationship between Isaiah 26:19 and Hosea 13:14.<sup>29</sup> He thus demonstrates that, while the view of resurrection in Daniel 12:2 is distinctive, it was also anticipated by earlier Old Testament writers. We may conclude, therefore, that it did not emerge as a result of foreign influence, but grew out of a faith that recognised God as the source of life, and which relied on him for protection from death and for ultimate vindication.

The picture of resurrection in Daniel 12:1-3 is still limited. Whilst eschatological post-mortem resurrection is clearly in view, the main emphasis in Daniel 12:1-3 may be on the vindication of those Jews who remained faithful to God in the face of persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, and the corresponding punishment of those who compromised their Jewish faith by embracing Greek culture and practices. If so, this does not set out a doctrine of universal resurrection; though nor does it exclude it.<sup>30</sup> Nor does it give details of what resurrection involves. Levenson argues that it points to bodily resurrection, rather than to an ethereal, disembodied state.<sup>31</sup> This might be inferred from the reference to the rising of *those who sleep in the dust of the earth*; it is even clearer in the text’s antecedents, for example, Isaiah 26:19 – *your dead will live, their bodies will rise*. We may note, further, that this is a *final* resurrection. There are several instances in the Old Testament to the resuscitation of corpses,<sup>32</sup> and these too might be

<sup>27</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection*, p. 189; see also Martin-Achard, *Death to Life*, pp. 143-144; Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel* (AOTC 20; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), p. 295.

<sup>28</sup> See Levenson, *Resurrection*, pp. 197-199; Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 224-225; Martin-Achard, *Death to Life*, pp. 130-133, 142; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 297-305; cf. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 485-488; according to Oswalt, ‘this represents the highest conception of resurrection in the OT’ (p. 485).

<sup>29</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection*, pp. 202-204.

<sup>30</sup> Spronk notes that in the Book of Enoch one division in the netherworld is for the wicked, who received their punishment in life, and suggests that this group may be those not raised in Dan. 12:1-3 (*Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 340-341).

<sup>31</sup> See also John Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Milton Keynes: Word, 1991), pp. 308-309.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. 1 Kgs 17:19-22; 2 Kgs 4:18-34; 13:21.

seen as preparing the way for the idea of resurrection. Nevertheless, those individuals would, presumably, have died a second time. The dead raised in Daniel 12:1-3 receive *eternal life*. Death, for them, has been abolished. Some see a Ugaritic background to the description of those who are resurrected shining *like the brightness of the heavens, and ... like the stars for ever and ever*,<sup>33</sup> though what this meant to the writer of Daniel is uncertain.<sup>34</sup> It does, however, suggest something qualitatively different from what went before. For the further development of this theme we can turn to some of the intertestamental writers,<sup>35</sup> and of course to the New Testament, which develops the doctrine in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Turning now to the immediate destination of those who die, we have already noted that Levenson objects to the traditional view that all, without discrimination, go to Sheol.<sup>36</sup> In a lecture series in 1990, James Barr also raised doubts about the idea of Sheol as a universal destination; he notes that Sheol ‘seems to be spoken of mainly in connection with the persons disapproved, the evildoers’;<sup>37</sup> and asks whether Abraham, Isaac, Moses and David were thought to be in Sheol. A more detailed discussion of death and afterlife in the Old Testament is given by Philip Johnston. He notes that of the thirty-four times that Sheol refers to human destiny, twenty-five are linked directly with the fate of the ungodly.<sup>38</sup> In seven the righteous contemplate descent into Sheol, though these are generally times of crisis.<sup>39</sup> So, for example, Jacob envisages going down to Sheol in sorrow following the death of Joseph (Gen. 37:35; cf. 42:38; 44:29, 31). Significantly, when Jacob learns that Joseph is alive, he declares himself ready for death, and when that death is described there is no mention of Sheol.<sup>40</sup> There are two passages (only) which seem to point to Sheol as a universal destiny: Psalm 89:48 and Ecclesiastes 9:10. The psalmist sets descent into Sheol against the background of divine judgment. For Ecclesiastes, consigning all human

<sup>33</sup> Spronk points out that the ‘deified spirits of the dead who were resurrected together with Baal could be called stars’ (*Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 342 cf. p. 157); he also notes that a similar idea is found in Egypt (p. 88). The Ugaritic links are not clear; and the idea of final resurrection in Daniel is different from the annual cycle found in the Baal myth. Even if the language and imagery is similar, the theological content is not.

<sup>34</sup> For further discussion see, e.g., Lucas, *Daniel*, pp. 294-296.

<sup>35</sup> See D. S. Russell, *The Jews from Alexander to Herod* (Oxford: OUP, 1967), pp. 148-154; idem, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (OTL; London: SCM, 1964), pp. 353-390; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), pp. 129-206.

<sup>36</sup> As examples of the traditional view he quotes Johannes Pederson and John Gray (*Resurrection*, pp. 35-36).

<sup>37</sup> James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality: the Read-Tuckwell Lectures for 1990* (London: SCM, 1992), p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Johnston, *Shades*, p. 80.

<sup>39</sup> Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29,31; Job 114:13; Ps. 88:3; Isa. 38:10.

<sup>40</sup> Johnston, *Shades*, p. 81.

beings to Sheol could be seen as part of what appears to be his sometimes exaggerated reflection on the meaninglessness of human existence. Neither needs to be seen as a significant exception to the general rule. Thus Johnston concludes that ‘Sheol cannot be identified simply as the Hebrew term for the underworld which awaits all. It is almost exclusively reserved for those under divine judgment, whether the wicked, the afflicted righteous, or all sinners. It seldom occurs of all humanity’.<sup>41</sup>

Levenson’s view is similar. He argues that whilst death is universal the terrors of Sheol are reserved for those who die ‘unfortunately’, outside the blessing of God. Where, by contrast, death comes at the end of a life that is fulfilled and blessed with descendants, there is no reference to Sheol; and the prospect of death is not feared as much as might be expected if the misery associated with Sheol was the only thing to look forward to. He suggests that the apparent exceptions, Psalm 89:48 and Ecclesiastes 9:10, reflect an older view that all the dead go to Sheol; though in view of their emphasis on the futility of life, which is just the opposite of blessing and fulfilment, these might also be seen to fit into his general pattern.

We have already noted that David and Joshua accept death with relative calm. God told Abraham that he would go to his fathers *in peace* (Gen. 15:15) – which suggests an outcome different from the traditional view of Sheol. Similarly, when Samuel is brought back by the medium at Endor, he complains about being disturbed (1 Sam. 28:15) – which, again, indicates a peaceful post-mortem existence. If he was facing the horrors usually associated with Sheol, we might expect that he would be glad to be disturbed! Indeed, the very fact that Samuel is able to return from Sheol challenges the traditional view.

But what is the alternative to the traditional understanding of Sheol?

Bruce Waltke takes the view that Sheol refers, primarily, to the grave. He maintains that the description of Sheol is figurative; the dead do not have consciousness, but wait in the grave for their final resurrection.<sup>42</sup> However, as noted already, Sheol is more usually understood to refer to the netherworld or underworld – pointing to the belief in some kind of post-mortem existence.<sup>43</sup> Also, if Sheol refers to the grave, it would be the destination of all who die; whereas we have noted that it is generally viewed as the destination of those under the judgment of God. There would seem to be little point in consigning the wicked to the terrors of Sheol (e.g.

<sup>41</sup> Johnston, *Shades*, p. 83.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, with C. Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: A Canonical and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), pp. 966-969.

<sup>43</sup> See above, n. 8.

Ps. 9:17; 55:15; Isa. 14:9-11) if, in fact, no such fate exists. It is possible that the language anticipates final resurrection – to everlasting life or to a Sheol-like eternity. However, it is doubtful whether this idea was widespread, particularly in pre-exilic Israelite belief; and there is no suggestion in the texts themselves that Sheol is understood in this way. To those standing on its threshold, the threat of Sheol is real now. Consequently, it seems better to accept the idea that Sheol signifies more than just the grave – it is the place of the dead, though not necessarily the place of *all* the dead.

Whilst arguing that Sheol is reserved for those who die untimely deaths or who die under divine judgment, Levenson accepts that the Old Testament is not clear about the alternative. He suggests that an important factor in dying blessed and contented is family. Several passages speak about someone who has died being ‘gathered to his people’.<sup>44</sup> This indicates more than sharing a communal grave, since it is applied to Abraham, who was buried only with Sarah; and Levenson suggests that it may relate to joining ancestors in the afterlife – though he argues that this cannot be in Sheol, which is characterised by isolation.<sup>45</sup> This might indicate an alternative destination; though Levenson does not develop that idea. Indeed, he argues that there is no ‘binary opposite of Sheol in the sense that the blessed go there to enjoy a beatific afterlife’.<sup>46</sup> He does suggest that the Temple, which had links with the Garden of Eden, offered worshippers a temporary freedom from death. But this stands against death and dying; it does not anticipate immortality after experiencing death. It does, though, envisage the possibility of a world from which death is finally banished; and so provides an antecedent to the later hope of resurrection.

For Levenson, before the eventual emergence of that hope, the key factor in dying blessed is evidence, before death, of the continuation of the family line and of the family name – through successive generations of descendants.<sup>47</sup> This is the key to a fulfilled life, and those who die fulfilled in this way do not need their personal existence to be prolonged beyond the grave. By contrast, Sheol is for those whose lives are not fulfilled: it is ‘the

<sup>44</sup> This expression is used of Abraham (Gen. 25:8), Ishmael (Gen. 25:17), Isaac (Gen. 35:29), Jacob (Gen. 49:33); Aaron and Moses (Num. 20:24; 27:13; Deut. 32:50). A similar expression, ‘gathered to their fathers’, describes the passing of the generation of Israelites that went into Canaan under Joshua (Judg. 2:10); and Josiah, too, was ‘gathered to his fathers’ (1 Kgs 22:20). The expression ‘slept with his fathers’ is generally related to kings who died peacefully – though there are exceptions. See also Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 33-35. Rather surprisingly, Johnston, too, does not develop this idea in his discussion of a possible alternative to Sheol.

<sup>45</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 76-81, 108-122.

continuation of the gloomy circumstances of the individual's death ... the prolongation of the unfulfilled life. There is no equivalent prolongation of the fulfilled life precisely because it is fulfilled.<sup>48</sup> This parallels the idea of Israel's future hope – which, again, is seen collectively. As the Old Testament writers look forward to the coming of God's kingdom and to future vindication, their main concern appears to be with what will happen to the community. Individuals might not survive to participate personally in Israel's future glory; however, because they see themselves as being vitally linked to the community, the hope of the resurrection and continued survival of the nation becomes their hope.<sup>49</sup>

In his review of Levenson's book, Stephen Cook commends it for the challenge it presents to the traditional understanding of death and afterlife,<sup>50</sup> and particularly for its emphasis on the significance of family ties. However, he argues that Levenson does not take this idea far enough. Cook finds it particularly incongruous that 'those in Sheol experience a prolongation of existence but that no alternative afterlife is available for the heroes of faith'.<sup>51</sup> He agrees that not all the dead faced the terrors associated with Sheol (though everyone may have worried about the prospect) and suggests that the way to experience a safe and peaceful existence beyond the grave was through fellowship with deceased family members.

Cook compares the funerary rites and afterlife expectations found in traditional African cultures with those found in the Old Testament, and explores potential parallels. In African kin-based communities death is feared, but it does not have the power to sever family connections. Those

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>49</sup> This may once have been explained as an example of 'corporate responsibility': the view that Israelites saw themselves, not as individuals, but as part of a psychical whole with the community, put forward by H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911). In the form suggested by Robinson, this has little support today; see, e.g., John W. Rogerson, 'The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: a re-examination', *JTS* 21 (1970), pp. 1-16. It is important, though, to recognise the importance of community in Israel's faith. Individual Israelites saw themselves, not in isolation, but as part of a community, which embraced not only contemporaries but also past generations, for example in the celebration of the Passover. This identification with the community results in seeking its well-being above personal interests – and that includes rejoicing in its future vindication and blessing; see, e.g., John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic / Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 527-537; Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 volumes (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995-1996), 1:60-64. Levenson maintains that in Jewish expectation, 'resurrection of the dead is always and inextricably associated with the restoration of the people Israel; it is not, in the first instance, focused on individual destiny' (*Resurrection*, pp. 156-165 [165]). This lays the foundation for the (later) view that the righteous dead experience vindication personally and not only through the fulfilment of God's promises to their descendants (p. 213); see also Martin-Achard, *Death to Life*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen L. Cook, 'Review of Jon D. Levenson: Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel', *RBL* 08/2007.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

connections are maintained through proper funerary rites, which include burial alongside other family members on ancestral land, and also by remembering and invoking the names of the deceased. This maintains a bond between the living and the dead; and ensures that those who die go to join their ancestors and so experience the protection that fellowship with them affords in the otherwise hostile netherworld.

In the Old Testament and particularly among those proponents of what Cook calls *Sinai theology* or *biblical Yahwism*,<sup>52</sup> remaining connected to family roots was crucial. He argues that ‘a large part of death’s terror was its threat of cutting a soul off from the verdant life of a genealogical tree planted on ancestral soil. In defiance of this threat, the fervent hope of each Israelite was to find burial on ancestral land.’<sup>53</sup> This desire to be buried with family members is reflected in other Judahite burial customs – in particular burial close to settlements, often in bench tombs where deceased family members were placed side by side.<sup>54</sup> Saul Olyan also notes the importance of burial with family members,<sup>55</sup> and the sometimes considerable efforts made by surviving relatives or friends to transport the bodies of those who die away from home back to the family grave.<sup>56</sup> He suggests that the physical proximity to other deceased family members may point to ‘something about familial social relations in the afterlife’;<sup>57</sup> though the nature of that relationship remains unclear. This physical proximity

<sup>52</sup> See Stephen L. Cook, *The Social Roots of Biblical Yahwism* (Studies in Biblical Literature 8; Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2004). Cook points to a stream of teaching that focused on the Sinaitic covenant and is reflected in Deuteronomy, the Former Prophets, the Psalms of Asaph, and the prophetic books of Jeremiah, Hosea and Malachi. Sinai theology comes to prominence at particular points, notably in the reforms of Hezekiah and particularly of Josiah; however it became dominant only after the exile. The traditions were preserved by ‘the people of the land’, who opposed the centralisation associated with the state and monarchy and its challenge to family based traditions. The land figured prominently in this Sinai theology. God apportioned land to family groups as an inheritance to be preserved within the family, rather than acquired by land-grabbing wealthy classes (*Social Roots*, pp. 15-44).

<sup>53</sup> Cook, ‘Funerary Practices’, p. 671.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTS 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); idem, ‘Life in Judah from the Perspective of the Dead’, *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65.2 (2002), pp. 120-137 (see also other articles in the same issue under the general title ‘Archaeology of the Dead’). On the value and limitations of archaeological and textual evidence regarding burial practices and life after death in Israel, see also Wayne T. Pitard, ‘Tombs and Offerings: Archaeology and Comparative Methodology in the Study of Death in Israel’ in *Sacred Time Sacred Place*, ed. by Barry M. Gittlen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), pp. 145-167; Theodore J. Lewis, ‘How Far Can Texts Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israel Beliefs About the Dead’, *ibid.*, pp. 169-217. See also Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 238-244.

<sup>55</sup> Saul M. Olyan, ‘Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology’, *JBL* 124.4 (2005), pp. 601-616. Olyan notes five modes of burial in order of desirability. Honourable burial in a family tomb heads the list – though burial in a substitute for the family tomb or even burial in someone else’s family tomb are viable options. Least desirable are dishonourable burial and no burial at all.

<sup>56</sup> These include Asahel (2 Sam. 2:32), Josiah (2 Kgs 23:30), Samson (Judg. 16:31) and Jacob (Gen. 49:29-31). Olyan also points to occasions where the remains of the deceased are removed from where they are buried in order to be placed in a family grave.

<sup>57</sup> Olyan, ‘Neglected Aspects’, p. 608.

might also have been seen to provide a link between the dead and the living, allowing surviving family members to carry out their responsibilities towards the dead – such as providing food for the dead, which may be in view in Deuteronomy 26:14.<sup>58</sup> However, whilst burial rites were clearly important in Israel, there is no unambiguous biblical evidence to support Cook's view that this fellowship provided protection from the ravages of Sheol.

Other factors also undermine Cook's position. He accuses Levenson of suggesting that 'life slams its door more firmly in the face of the righteous than in the face of the sinner';<sup>59</sup> but his own view, that security beyond the grave is linked primarily to kinship, rather than to the righteousness or otherwise of a person's life raises similar questions of theodicy. He does note that an opposite of individuals being gathered to their people, is being 'cut off' – which he relates to the severance of family ties. In the Pentateuch, breaking certain laws resulted in offenders being 'cut off from their people' (e.g. Exod. 31:14; Lev. 7:20–21; 18:29; 19:8; 20:2:3; Num. 15:30–31). The nature of this threat in a legal context is unclear. I have argued elsewhere that it most likely refers to breaking the link with the covenant community (cf. Exod. 12:15, 19; Num. 19:13; Num. 19:20);<sup>60</sup> though it may be linked with premature (if not necessarily immediate) death, being denied descendants, or possibly judgment beyond the grave by not being given the proper burial that would enable continued fellowship with ancestors. If this further includes the removal of the asylum provided by kinship in the netherworld then it might point to divine judgment on the wicked, and this goes some way to resolving the issue of theodicy. However, the 'cutting off' is often linked with God's direct activity (Lev. 17:10; Lev. 20:3,5–6; Ezek. 14:8); and while it might be accompanied by legal action, generally the death penalty (e.g. Num. 15:32–36 cf. Exod. 31:14; Lev. 20:3; 23:29), that action is not specifically described as effecting the 'cutting off' – that seems to remain God's prerogative, and if the community does not fulfil its judicial responsibility, God will still take action against the guilty party (Lev. 20:5). This seems to allow the possibility of someone whose crime is unrecognised being buried

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<sup>58</sup> On this practice see, further, Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, pp. 122–126; Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 169–170.

<sup>59</sup> Cook, 'Review of Levenson'.

<sup>60</sup> Robin L. Routledge, 'Sacrifice, Prayer and Forgiveness' (a paper presented at Tyndale Fellowship Old Testament Study Group, July 2002); see also Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1962–1965), 1:264, n. 182. For further discussion, of the expression, see Eryl W. Davies, *Numbers* (NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans / London: Marshall Pickering, 1995), pp. 83–84; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (Anchor Bible, vol. 3; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 457–460; Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (AOTC; Nottingham: Apollos/Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), *passim*; Gordon J. Wenham, *Leviticus* (NICOT; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), pp. 241–243.

in a family grave, but still being cut off from his people by God – and this, in turn, raises the question of the efficacy of the funerary rite. There is a similar problem in the case of the righteous. Whilst Cook notes that physical interment with family members is important, the more significant reality is what this represents: the reunion of the souls of the deceased.<sup>61</sup> And Cook goes on to suggest that Abraham, Aaron and Moses were all gathered to their people (Gen. 25:8; Num. 20:24; 27:13) despite not being buried in ancestral graves.<sup>62</sup> If the righteous may be gathered to their people irrespective of where their bodies lie, whilst the unrighteous may be cut off from their people by God, again irrespective of whether or not they have been buried in a family grave, the determinative factor seems to be, not where and how they were buried, but their standing before God.

We have also noted problems with understanding *nephesh* as ‘soul’. There are passages that refer to the *nephesh* leaving (Gen. 35:18; Jer. 15:9) or returning (1 Kgs 17:21-22) to the body, and some (including Cook) take this to suggest a meaning closer to ‘soul’.<sup>63</sup> However, the focus of these passages is death and resuscitation not afterlife, and *nephesh* here may be understood in its primary sense of ‘breath’ or ‘life’. There is no direct indication that it refers to a disembodied immortal soul.<sup>64</sup> On the few occasions that the dead in Sheol are mentioned, it is not as souls but as *rephaim* (‘shades’).<sup>65</sup> And in texts that refer to the *nephesh* going into or being rescued from Sheol (e.g. Ps. 30:3; 86:13; 88:3), *nephesh* generally

<sup>61</sup> Cook, ‘Funerary Practices’, pp. 673-674.

<sup>62</sup> Abraham was buried in Mamre, only with Sarah (Gen. 25:9-10); Aaron died on Mount Hor (Num. 20:22-29) and Moses in Moab (Deut. 34:5-6) – after both were excluded from entering the Promised Land.

<sup>63</sup> Cook claims that ‘the Hebrew belief in a ‘soul’ ... separable from the body would be undeniable even if our only evidence was 1 Kings 17:17-24’ (‘Funerary Practices’, p. 668; see also Barr, *Garden of Eden*, pp. 36-47).

<sup>64</sup> In Lev. 21:11 it refers to just the opposite – a dead body. This might again be taken to indicate the close association of *nephesh* with the whole person.

<sup>65</sup> Job 26:5; Ps. 88:10; Prov. 2:18; 9:18; Isa. 14:9; 26:14,19; see further, Day, *Yahweh*, pp. 217-225; Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 128-142. Day notes that in Ugarit, the term refers to the deified dead – which differs from the picture in the Old Testament; see also Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 134-140. Day does see some parallel, though, in the description of Samuel when he is called up by Saul, and the medium sees *elohim* coming up out of the ground (1 Sam. 28:13). *Elohim* is commonly used for God but may also refer to other spiritual beings – see, e.g., R. L. Routledge, ‘An Evil Spirit from the Lord: Demonic Influence or Divine Instrument’. Describing the dead as *elohim* does seem to suggest divine status. Day suggests that *elohim* may also refer to the dead in Isa. 8:19 (*Yahweh*, p. 218; see also Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 146-147); and Johnston also adds Num. 25:2. In each of these cases, though, the practice of venerating the dead as gods is linked with pagan practices that are generally condemned by the Old Testament writers, and so not part of Israel’s official faith (on the distinction between Israel’s official and popular faith, see below, p. 23, n. 73). The medium’s words in 1 Sam. 28:13 still raise a question; the verb is plural, indicating that *elohim* is also plural – so who are the beings that come up alongside Samuel? Cook suggests that they are family members, in whose company Samuel is kept safe from the dangers of the afterlife. Another explanation is given by Johnston. Following Hutter, he suggests that ‘I see spirits rising’ may be a Hittite formula indicating that contact with the dead had been made, rather than signifying number. This view may be reinforced by the fact that this is followed by a description of Samuel alone.

stands for the life of the whole person;<sup>66</sup> who hopes to be, or already has been, delivered from a (particular) crisis that has brought him to the brink of death, or one so grave that he feels he is already in Sheol.<sup>67</sup>

The view that the *nephesh* can be thought of as a separable, immortal ‘soul’ is therefore reading too much into the Old Testament text. It also distorts the significance of the world of the dead for the Old Testament writers. Cook goes too far in suggesting that there was as much interest in the afterlife among the Old Testament writers as among the African tribes he uses as a model (always a danger when attempting such sociological parallels). However, neither was there total disinterest. The importance attached to burial rites, and Saul’s attempt to contact the dead Samuel – which, in view of the need to legislate against such practices, is unlikely to have been an isolated incident – suggests that the dead were not thought to pass into oblivion. However, the precise nature of any continued existence is not made clear.

The apparent lack of interest in the dead in the Old Testament is at variance with some of Israel’s neighbours in the Ancient Near East.<sup>68</sup> In Egypt, for example, there was a well developed view of the afterlife. It was seen as a continuation of life – though death itself was fraught with danger and Pyramid and coffin texts and the *Book of the Dead* include spells and incantations to ward off evil and ensure a safe passage from this life to the next.<sup>69</sup> This view appears to have had little impact on Israel. The Mesopotamian description of the netherworld is similar to the Old Testament portrayal of Sheol. It is dark and dismal, and described as a ‘land of no return’.<sup>70</sup> However, its prominence in myths such as the

<sup>66</sup> In Ps. 88:3, for example, ‘my *nephesh*’ parallels ‘my life’.

<sup>67</sup> In Psalm 88 the psalmist begins by saying that his ‘*nephesh* draws near to Sheol’ (v. 3); however he goes on to describe himself as already having descended to the world of the dead (vv. 5-8). Similarly, Jonah cries out to God ‘from the depths of Sheol’ (Jon. 2:1). Because the petitioner is clearly not dead, these are usually taken metaphorically; the depth of the crisis is so great it is as if he is in Sheol. Levenson disagrees; and argues, instead, that while we see death in two stages: intense suffering, that may be reversed, followed by a final, permanent state that is irreversible, in Hebrew thought there was continuity between illness or affliction and death; he claims that ‘whereas we think of a person who is gravely ill, under lethal assault, or sentenced to capital punishment as still alive, the Israelites were quite capable of seeing such an individual as dead’ (Levenson, *Resurrection*, p. 38). The Old Testament does, though, indicate a discontinuity between even serious illness and death. David prayed for the son born to him and Bathsheba while he was alive; but stopped when the child died, noting: ‘Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me’ (2 Sam. 12:23). And Levenson himself has to admit that there is a distinction between the living who experience Sheol and those permanent members of Sheol – who are unable to cry out to God for help and so have no hope of return. This is not very different from the metaphorical interpretation he questions – and that remains the more likely way of viewing these passages.

<sup>68</sup> For an overview of Ancient Near Eastern views see, e.g., Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 230-239; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 86-236.

<sup>69</sup> For examples of Egyptian mortuary inscriptions, see *Context of Scripture*, 2:53-67.

<sup>70</sup> *Context of Scripture*, p. 381.

*Gilgamesh Epic* and *The Descent of Ishtar/Innana* indicate a greater degree of interest in the world of the dead than we find in the Old Testament.<sup>71</sup> Necromancy seems also to have been prevalent in Mesopotamia, as it was in many parts of the Ancient Near East – including Ugarit. It is probable that it was Ugaritic and Canaanite beliefs and practices that had the greatest influence on the way ordinary Israelites thought about the dead – including necromancy, deification of dead ancestors and funerary feasts.<sup>72</sup> However, such practices are generally condemned by the Old Testament writers, indicating that this was part of popular theology, though not of true Yahwistic covenant faith.<sup>73</sup>

Some Old Testament passages do seem to suggest a belief in some form of continued fellowship with God that the godly may enjoy after death.<sup>74</sup> One is Psalm 16:10 – *you will not abandon me to Sheol, nor will you let your Holy One see decay*. As noted already, passages that speak about being rescued from Sheol generally refer to deliverance from a particular life-threatening crisis; and this passage could be interpreted in the same way.<sup>75</sup> However, whilst there may be the hint of danger (v. 1), that does not appear to be a major concern. Rather, the psalmist revels in communion with God; and the reference to not being abandoned to Sheol may point to a confidence that even death will not bring that communion to an end.<sup>76</sup> Though there is no explanation of how that might happen. Psalm

<sup>71</sup> Tablet 7 of the *Gilgamesh Epic* describes Enkidu's nightmare of his impending death; see also *Context of Scripture*, 1:381-390.

<sup>72</sup> Day, *Yahweh*; see also Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, 'Death in the Life of Israel' in Gittlen, *Sacred Time*, pp. 139-143; Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); Smith, *Early History of God*, pp. 126-132; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 247-250; see also Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 150-195.

<sup>73</sup> Smith criticises Spronk for 'distinguishing between Yahwistic religion and popular religion', noting that 'all sectors of Israelite society, including priests, prophets, and kings, participated in what was later condemned as non-Yahwistic religion' (*History of God*, pp. 126-127 [126]; see Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 257,345). Although these groups might represent the official position, that was often at variance with the position of the Old Testament writers – including the true prophets. Cook discusses the existence of a stream of 'biblical Yahwism', by which he understands 'the overt religious points of view that the Bible presents and supports' (Cook, *Social Roots*, p. 1). Whilst not accepting every aspect of Cook's argument, it seems reasonable to speak about Israel's Yahwistic covenant faith – to which true prophets urge the people to return.

<sup>74</sup> The translations of Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11-12) might also be taken to indicate another destination: they did not die and so are not in Sheol, so where are they? However, the OT writers make no attempt to answer that question. Neither is mentioned in any OT texts in relation to the afterlife. Enoch's translation is given no theological significance in the OT. There is the view that Elijah will return (something he could not do from Sheol) to herald the Day of the LORD; but this is not linked with the future destination of the righteous.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Levenson, *Resurrection*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>76</sup> See further, Philip S. Johnston, "'Left in Hell'? Psalm 16, Sheol and the Holy One', in Satterthwaite, Hess and Wenham, *Lord's Anointed*, pp. 213-222; idem, *Shades*, pp. 201-202; Barr, *Garden of Eden*, pp. 32-33. Martin-Achard argues that 'the psalmist ... is not looking to God to rescue him from the grave' (*Death to Life*, p. 152); however he does suggest that the psalmist envisages no end to his communion with God (*Death to Life*, pp. 147-153); see also Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 334-338.

49:15 also expresses the hope that *God will redeem* [the psalmist's] *life from Sheol*; and again there is the suggestion of a more general deliverance. Wealthy oppressors cannot escape death (v. 14); however, unlike his persecutors, the psalmist, who will also die, will be ransomed from Sheol by God. Again, any alternative destination is not made clear; however, while Sheol is characterised by separation from God, the psalmist has a better hope: *he will surely take me to himself*.<sup>77</sup> David Mitchell links references to Sheol in the Korah psalms (which include Ps. 49) with the judgment on Korah and his followers, who *went down alive into Sheol* (Num. 16:38), and suggests that the sons of Korah, who were spared (Num. 26:11), may have perpetuated some idea of resurrection.<sup>78</sup> Mitchell links this with being lifted out of Sheol – though in the Numbers passage, the Sons of Korah are delivered from ever going down into Sheol. This might mean being spared death; or may, in the case of Ps. 49:15, point to a more general hope of avoiding Sheol – but, again, what that alternative may be is unclear.

Passages such as these are, however, too rare and too ambiguous to suggest the belief in Israel of an afterlife in the presence of God.<sup>79</sup> At best, they express a feeling after something more than the shadowy netherworld of Sheol – to which the faithful servants of God and those who oppress them are dispatched without distinction, and where a lifetime of communion with God is brought to an abrupt end. This feeling after an alternative to Sheol, which is highlighted in recent research, may also be indicated by the significance of burial practices, and the suggestion of continued fellowship with family members after death.<sup>80</sup> However, no significant attempt is made to set out an alternative – suggesting, in line with the older view, that the matter was not of overriding importance.<sup>81</sup> The

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<sup>77</sup> Kidner links *take me to himself* with Gen. 5:24 – *Enoch was no more because God took him* (*Psalms 1-72*, p. 185); see also Barr, *Garden of Eden*, p. 33. Note the interpretation given by Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 360; cf. Johnston, *Shades*, p. 204; Levenson, *Resurrection*, pp. 103-104; Martin-Achard, *Death to Life*, pp. 153-158; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 327-334.

<sup>78</sup> David C. Mitchell, “‘God will Redeem my Soul from Sheol’: The Psalms of the Sons of Korah”, *JSOT* 30.3 (2006), pp. 365-384.

<sup>79</sup> Spronk also links Ps. 103 and Ps. 73 with Israelite expectations of the afterlife, based on their associations with Canaanite ideas (*Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 285-289, 315-327).

<sup>80</sup> Eichrodt notes the importance attached to burial rites – though regards continued fellowship with family members incompatible with the idea of Sheol (Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:213).

<sup>81</sup> Spronk argues that the view of afterlife in Israel was significantly influenced by Canaanite practices, and that the paucity of references to afterlife in the Old Testament is not because of a lack of interest, or a lack of confidence in God, but primarily in the earlier period because of ‘the fear of becoming entangled in the Canaanite ideas about life and death’ (*Beatific Afterlife*, p. 344). This may be a partial explanation. However, when the final doctrine emerges any Baal imagery has been significantly transformed; and it is reasonable to assume that those differences would have been clear in the earlier period too. If the Old Testament writers thought the issue was pressing, they would have found a way to express it. The fact that there are relatively few references, with no very clear articulation of the doctrine of afterlife or

life that the Old Testament writers encourage God's people to seek involves knowing God's presence and blessing now, rather than in the hereafter. The desire is for such a life to be long and fulfilled, avoiding the possibility of an untimely or unfortunate descent into Sheol. The implicit longing for an alternative to Sheol will be satisfied in time, in the doctrine of resurrection set out in Daniel 12:1-3, which is seen now, not as something entirely new, but the clearer articulation of a hope that is rooted in Israel's confidence in the justice of God and in his power to preserve his faithful people even from the threat of death. In the meantime, whilst I don't think Levenson goes far enough in his discussion, he is probably right (*contra* Cook) in upholding the view that future hope was, primarily, collective: focusing on the continuation of the family, through descendants, and of the nation as a whole.

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immortality indicates that the matter was less important in Yahwistic faith than in the religions of Israel's neighbours.

## The Rescue of Bulgaria's Jews from *Shoah*<sup>1</sup>

### Part 2: A Case for Authentic Christian Communal Ethics

In the first part of this paper (published in the last issue of this Journal) I enquired into the guiding vision of the rescuers of the Bulgarian Jews during the *Shoah*. I have argued that this is the vision put forward by the nineteenth century revivalists in their struggle to overcome Ottoman oppression. Still one more facet of the rescue phenomenon is missing. The Bulgarian Revival was a deeply religiously-inspired movement. At its source was a monk—St Paisii of Hilendar monastery on the Holy Mountain in Halkidiki.<sup>2</sup> His *Slavo-Bolgar History* set the Revival in motion.<sup>3</sup> Before aspiring to national freedom, the revivalists were calling for the regaining of Bulgarian identity and freedom from the Hellenizing of both education and the church. As with all of the Christian communions in the Ottoman Empire, the Bulgarian Orthodox autocephaly (of the Patriarchate of Ohrid) had been completely dismantled in 1767 and transferred to the direct control of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople. As a noted Orthodox historian writes: ‘The rise of Bulgarian nationalism in the mid-1800s revived interest in the Bulgarian [autocephalos] church’. Independence did not come without a struggle. The Ecumenical Patriarch ‘officially declared the Bulgarian church schismatic in 1872’.<sup>4</sup>

These were the struggles for gaining ecclesial independence from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople and the forceful establishment

<sup>1</sup> The paper is in honour of the Bulgarian people and it is dedicated to the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of rescuing Bulgarian Jews from deportation to the Nazi concentration camps.

<sup>2</sup> Paisii of Hilendar (1722-ca.1773) was one of the earliest Bulgarian revivalists. In his monumental historic research he was the first to express the idea of national revival and liberation of the Bulgarian people from Ottoman oppression. He is the key figure epitomising the transition from the medieval period to the period of Bulgarian national cultural and political self-determination. He was canonised as a saint by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on 26 June 1962, His saint’s day is 19 June.

<sup>3</sup> Istorija Slavjanobolgarskaja (Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria: Slovo Publishers, 1999, in Bulgarian). Full text available electronically on <http://slovo.bg/showwork.php3?AuID=15&WorkID=92&Level=1>, accessed on 15 April 2008. In referencing the sources in Part 2 of the paper I will assume that the bibliographical description runs through the whole paper and a full description of a source may have been listed in Part 1.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Burgess, *The Eastern Orthodox Churches: Concise Histories with Chronological Checklist of their Primates* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2005), p. 91. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople recognised the Church’s independence only on 22 February 1945 and its Patriarchal status on 1 August 1961. Even after regaining their freedom from Ottoman oppression Bulgarians continued to struggle to overcome the obstacles of Hellenist suppression and to regain their religious identity as an independent nation. Cf. Bistra Nikolova, *Ustrojstvo i upravlenie na Balgarskata pravoslavna tsarkva (IX-XIV vek)* (*Structure and Governing of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (IX-XIV century)*) (Sofia: Akademichno Izdatelstvo ‘Prof. Marin Drinov’, 1977, in Bulgarian). For the significance of the 1830-40s in inspiring the national revival and in the (trans)formation of Bulgarian self-identity as it is seen from the perspective of Serbian neighbours, see Vladimir Sojanchevich, *Srbi i Bugari 1804-1878 [Serbs and Bulgarians 1804-1878]* (Novi Sad, Serbia: Prometej, 1995), pp. 179-96.

of the Bulgarian independent exarchate that hastened Bulgaria's strivings for independence. The Bulgarian cultural and political Renaissance in the 1850-70s is deeply rooted in the revival of national identity and Orthodox spirituality.<sup>5</sup> The Bulgarian Revival is not simply another reincarnation of the European Enlightenment. It is a national ideology which owes much of its idealistic and inspirational force to the charismatic 'Apostle of freedom'—Vasil Levski (Vasil Ivanov Kunchev 1837-1873) who was caught, tried, and sentenced to death by the Turkish court, and decided to die under his monastic name of hiero-monk Ignatius of the St. Spas Orthodox monastery around Sopot, Bulgaria. Levski was as much a pragmatic revolutionary as a compassionate visionary drawn into the biblical narrative.<sup>6</sup> He inspired building in the place of the oppressive Ottoman Empire 'a temple of truth and freedom with justice ... solidarity, brotherhood, and perfect equality of all peoples. Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, etc. will have equal rights in any respect... All will be under the same law, on which they all will decide with a democratic vote.'<sup>7</sup> The slogan of his vision was the dream of a democratic and tolerant 'pure and holy republic'.<sup>8</sup> The Bulgarian national psyche, and later the church, canonised him; the memory and the vision of this national hero and martyr became a point of departure for the generations to follow.<sup>9</sup>

One can easily find the vocabulary of the defenders of the Jews fully at home in the ideas of the Bulgarian revival. I provided this snapshot of a century-long history of the Bulgarian revival to back up my thesis that the rescue of Bulgaria's Jews was not a spontaneous reaction of solitary heroes. Objections to the harassment and deportation of the Jews were natural outcomes of a community acting out of deep convictions. These were people who had internalised Levski's biblical vision of the free, pure and holy republic for all people. But if this is true for the ordinary populace,

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Nikolay Genchev, *Nauchni Trudove* [Scientific Publications] (Sofia: Gutenberg Publishing House, 2003, in Bulgarian), Volume I, pp. 533-68; volume II, pp. 483-7. For a succinct account of the history and ideas of the Bulgarian national Revival, see Konstantin Kosev, *Kratka Istorija na Balgarskoto Vazrazhdane* [Short History of the Bulgarian Revival] (Sofia, BG: 'Prof. Marin Drinov' Academic Publisher, 2001 in Bulgarian). The impact and the fruition of the revivalist spirit are particularly evident in the activities of the Bulgarian national intelligentsia both in the country and the émigré. A characteristic example is the life and work of Prof Marin Drinov—a world-class historian and the founding Chairman of the Bulgarian Scientific Society (the forerunner of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, 1869). Not surprisingly his first scholarly works investigate Bulgarian cultural revival, the origins of the Bulgarian people and the history of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Ljudmila Gorina, *Marin Drinov: Istorik i Obshtestven Deets* [Marin Drinov: A Historian and Public Figure] (Sofia, BG: 'Prof. Marin Drinov' Academic Publisher, 2006 in Bulgarian), pp. 8, 35-41).

<sup>6</sup> Stoyanov, *Zapiski po Balgarskite Vastania* and Genchev, *Nauchni Trudove*, volume II, pp. 5-13 and 376-97.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., volume II, p. 424; cf. 398 (my translation). One may see here the justification of having all significant minorities represented at the crafting of the founding Turnovo Constitution.

<sup>8</sup> From Levski's letter to the editor of the newspaper 'Svoboda' (Freedom), published on 13.02.1871, see Genchev, *Nauchni Trudove*, volume II, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Genchev, *Nauchni Trudove*, volume II, p. 337.

was the same vision upheld by the leadership of the Christian communities at the time? In other words, can one discern the trajectory relating vision, theology and Christian social ethics, which I have considered elsewhere?<sup>10</sup> In the second part of this research I will take a look at the involvement of different Christian communions in rescuing their Jewish compatriots.

## The Orthodox

In Frederic Chary's words: 'No other institution with comparable influence so consistently opposed the government's anti-Semitic policy as did the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox church'.<sup>11</sup> The church's leading prelates: Metropolitan Stefan of the capital city of Sofia (future Exarch, 1945-48), Metropolitan Cyril of the second largest Bulgarian city of Plovdiv (future Patriarch, 1953-71), and Metropolitan Neofit of Vidin (the acting President of the Holy Synod) unanimously and vocally condemned the repressive measures of the Law for the Defence of the Nation (LDN). All Church officials followed their lead.<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that Cyril, a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, backed Professor Popov's studies<sup>13</sup> with his brochure *Faith and Resolution*, refuting antisemitism as early as 1938. From 1940 to the end of the War, the 'Jewish question was one of the most frequently debated topics in the Holy Synod's meetings'.<sup>14</sup> During the days of impending deportation in March 1943 both Stefan and Cyril offered refuge to the leaders of the Jewish community in their private homes.

Even before publication of the LDN, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church issued a Statement in defence of both Jews converted to Christianity and of the Jews as a legitimate minority in Bulgaria. 'No actions shall be taken against the Jews as a national minority'.<sup>15</sup> After the publication of the Law, official reaction of the Orthodox Church was swift and indignant. An offspring of a revolutionary priestly family from the time of the Revival, Metropolitan Stefan, took the cause of the Jews as his personal mission. On numerous occasions he intervened with the police and local government authorities on behalf of the Jews. In spite of the government attacking and vilifying him, he preached bold sermons against

<sup>10</sup> Parushev, 'Walking in the Dawn of the Light', Chapter Five.

<sup>11</sup> Bulgarian Jews, p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> Bar-Zohar, 'The Metropolitans', chap. 13 in *Beyond Hitler's Grasp*.

<sup>13</sup> Contrary to the Nazi's 'scientific' racism, in Bulgaria, the very notion of racial inferiority was confronted and discarded by the influential Bulgarian biologist Dr Metodi Popov, Professor of Sofia University, in a series of publications and public lectures. For some of his lectures, he and his audience were harassed by pro-fascist youth (David Cohen, 'Political Golgotha: A Nation Cannot Be Divided', in Foll, compl. and ed., *Bulgarians and the Jews*, vol. 2, (pp. 8-107), p. 39).

<sup>14</sup> Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler's Grasp*, p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, *Otseljavaneto*, p. 132; cf. Todorov, *Fragility of Goodness*, p. 56.

antisemitism. Learning first hand about the deportation of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, he rushed to inform the King and asked him to rescue them but the King did not respond.<sup>16</sup>

After the failed attempt at deportation on 9 March 1943, Stefan led the Holy Synod to clearly oppose any further measures against the Jews. The leaders of the Church held a dramatic meeting in Sofia (2 April 1943). The minutes of the meeting read that after having reminded the members of the Synod of his firm support for Bulgarian Jews, Metropolitan Cyril repeated his warning addressed to the government: ‘until now [I] have always been loyal towards the government, now I reserve the right to act with a free hand in this matter [of defence of the Jews] and heed only the dictates of my free conscience’.<sup>17</sup> It is an unprecedented statement from the highest ranking prelate of a State Church. The Synod issued a sharp statement and the Church’s prelates confronted both the Prime Minister and the King on their anti-Jewish policy. On behalf of the Synod, its President warned the King that ‘...because of the extraordinary measures ... [and] unscrupulous harshness against the Jews ... God’s wrath against our people may be provoked’.<sup>18</sup> This strong language is reminiscent to the one used by the sixteenth-century Ecumenical Patriarch Metrophanes III in his encyclical preventing anti-Jewish manifestations among Orthodox Christians.<sup>19</sup> The irony in the demeanour of the Bulgarian Orthodox hierarchy actively opposing governmental anti-Jewish policy is in the fact that the supposedly submissive ‘ceasaro-papic’ church took bold steps to confront and even chasten the ‘Caesar’ while the ‘papo-ceasaric’ leadership of the Latin church(es) kept publicly silent in the face of the ‘Messiah-of-the-Third-Reich’s’ murderous brutality.<sup>20</sup> No doubt these warnings and the

<sup>16</sup> 11,323 Jews from the territories under Bulgarian administration in Thrace and Macedonia were deported in early March 1943. I analysed the reasons for failing to rescue these Jewish citizens of Greece and Yugoslavia in ‘Walking in the Dawn of the Light’, pp. 301-5.

<sup>17</sup> Cohan, *Otseljavaneto*, p. 230; cf. Todorov, *Fragility of Goodness*, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler’s Grasp*, p. 173. Metropolitan Neofit’s statement has a startling parallel with the ‘God’s message’ delivered to the King by Rabbi Tzion on the encouragement of Metropolitan Stefan, *ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>19</sup> See Parushev, ‘Walking in the Dawn of the Light’, Chapter Eight; cf. George C. Papademetriou, ‘An Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarch Metrophanes III (1520-1580) Condemning the Oppression of Jews’, in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26:2 (Spring 1989), pp. 338-40. As recorded by Mordecai Paldiel, several high-ranking prelates of the Greek Orthodox Church took a similar stand and used almost the same argument in protesting to the Greek Prime Minister ‘against the latter’s acquiescence at the treatment of the Jews by the German overlords in the occupied part of Greece’ (*Sheltering the Jews: Stories of Holocaust Rescuers*, foreworded by Franklin H. Littell (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 129-30). In this regard, it is worth researching the extent of Patriarch Methrophanes’ legacy of sympathetic treatment of the Jews in the Orthodox ecclesial territories under Ottoman rule.

<sup>20</sup> This paradox is well captured in Hannah Arendt’s account. After reflecting on metropolitan Stefan’s rationale for hiding Sofia’s chief rabbi—Asher Hananel—in his own home: Because ‘God determines the fate of the Jewish people and nobody has the right to torture and persecute Jews’—she writes: ‘That was considerably clearer and more unambiguous than everything we had heard from the Vatican’ (‘Eichmann in Jerusalem’, p. 115); this ambiguity of the Holy See was sealed at the signing of the Lateran Pacts

Church's bold support were 'a very influential factor in Boris' rejection of deportation as a solution to the Jewish question'.<sup>21</sup>

## The Catholics

In the life-and-death issue of rescuing the Jews, denominational boundaries and politics seem disposable. Metropolitan Stefan knew the influence of the small but active Bulgarian Roman-Catholic community on the Italian-born Bulgarian Queen Giovanna. During the dramatic days of despair at the pending deportation he directed the Jewish leaders pleading for help to meet with Catholic priest Fr. Jean Romanov, who was the Queen's spiritual father.<sup>22</sup> By then the personal friend of Stefan, Monsignor Roncalli (the future Pope John XXIII) had already secured, with the help of King Boris, transit visas for thousands of Jews from Slovakia and Hungary who were escaping concentration camps by immigrating to Palestine. He 'intervened directly in favour of the Bulgarian Jews'. And the King listened to the prelate.<sup>23</sup>

Stefan and the faith communities did not stop protesting and castigating the government and the King on behalf of the Jews. And they did more. According to the provisions of LDN some Jews were exempted from the provisions of 'The Law for Protection of the Nation' without being declared non-Jewish. According to Article 33, the provisions of the Law did not apply to three categories of Bulgarian-Jewish citizens. Two were strictly limited to converts to the Christian religion before the enactment of the law. While theoretically these exemptions would benefit very few, in practice they were widely used by religious and civilian authorities to sabotage the startling legislation.

In his disengaged assessment of the situation of the Jews in Bulgaria during and after the Second World War, Peter Meyer writes:

Ministers of various Christian denominations engaged in mass 'mercy-baptisms'; several of them were removed from offices because of this.... High dignitaries of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church declared that 'conversion to Christianity' and 'formal baptism' were two different acts, the first of which necessarily

<sup>21</sup> between Pope Pius XI and the Fascist government of Mussolini on 11 February 1929. I commented in my dissertation, Chapter Five on the two communions' different perspectives on Church-State relationship.

<sup>22</sup> Chary, *Bulgarian Jews*, p. 189; cf. Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, p. 328.

<sup>23</sup> Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler's Grasp*, p. 194. Apostolic Delegate in Sofia, Monsignor Giuseppe Mazzoli, and the Apostolic Delegate in Istanbul, Monsignor Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, were actively involved in negotiating the rescuing of the Jews (*ibid.*, pp. 188 and 202-3). On cooperation and good relations between Bulgarian Orthodox and Catholics in Bulgaria, see Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Council*, A Geoffrey Chapman Book (London, U.K.: Cassell Ltd., 1984), pp. 141, 175-7; on Roncalli's ten-year tenure as the first papal representative in Bulgaria for over five centuries, see *ibid.*, pp. 113-42.

<sup>23</sup> Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, p. 330.

preceded the second, sometimes by a considerable period; because the law spoke of conversion and not of baptism having to take place before September 1, 1940. Jews baptized later could also be saved if the ministers declared that they had expressed their will to adopt Christianity before that date. Many courts accepted this reasoning. In this way, a number of baptized Jews and offspring of mixed marriages escaped the provisions of the law.<sup>24</sup>

## The Evangelicals

Small evangelical communities in Bulgaria also stepped up public activities, protesting to the King in the defence of the country's Jews.<sup>25</sup> In the early 1940s Nazi publications in Germany were constantly complaining of Bulgarian complacency in the enforcement of the LDN and the impairing of provisions of the law by the religious authorities. One paper observes that one of the ministers .... 'with a community of about 200 souls, managed to baptize 200 additional persons [all of them Jews] between January and September 1940'.<sup>26</sup> This information was widely publicised by the official pro-fascist governmental press both in Bulgaria and in Germany.<sup>27</sup>

I have been searching for years for any evidence of the direct involvement of Bulgarian evangelicals in the rescue efforts.<sup>28</sup> My research gives evidence that these unnamed ministers removed from office for baptizing 200 Jews are the Congregationalist Pastor Asen Mikhailov Simeonov and the Baptist Pastor Petar Minkov Radev.<sup>29</sup> Involvement of the evangelical communities is perhaps the lesser known Christian contribution to the rescue of the Jews and deserves further research.

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<sup>24</sup> 'Bulgaria', in Peter Meyer, Bernard D. Weinryb, Eugene Duschinsky and Nicolas Sylvain, *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, reprint (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1971. Originally sponsored by American Jewish Committee and published in 1953 by Syracuse University Press), p. 571.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, *Otseljavaneto*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>26</sup> Meyer, 'Bulgaria', p. 571.

<sup>27</sup> D. Andreev's article in the newspaper *Dnes (Today)*, 24 June 1941 as quoted by Ljubomir Vladikin, 'Die Judengesetzgebung in Bulgarien', *Weltkampf*, Munich, No. 2 (October-December 1942), p. 291; referenced in Meyer, 'Bulgaria', p. 623.

<sup>28</sup> I want to express my special gratitude to Dr Hristo Kulichev for his support and help in finding contacts and materials of the Bulgarian evangelical relationship with the Jews during WWII. He was instrumental in organising a meeting with Lidia Simeonova, the daughter of Asen Simeonov. She provided personal documents from her father's file from the archives of the Bulgarian Communist security system and gave me some indispensable insights into her father's life and ministry for the Jews (personal interview, 14 March 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Hristo Kulichev, ed., *Vestitely na Istinita: Istorija na Evangelskite Tsarkvi v Bulgaria (Heralds of the Truth: A History of the Evangelical Churches in Bulgaria)*, 2nd ed. (Sofia: Bulgarian Bible Society, 1994, in Bulgarian), pp. 264-5; 275-6. Based on his further research Kulichev argues that the number of saved Jews could be as high as 300, see Hristo Kulichev, *Zaslugite na Protestantite za Balgarskija Narod [Protestant Contributions to Bulgarian People]*, forthcoming], chapter 'Protestant Contributions for Rescuing the Jews', unpublished material sent by the author on 26 April 2007.

Born into an Orthodox family strongly connected to the Bulgarian Revival, Simeonov<sup>30</sup> apparently converted into a Methodist church while studying in Pleven. He studied theology in Switzerland, married a Congregationalist and was appointed as the pastor of the First Evangelical (Congregational) Church in the capital Sofia.<sup>31</sup> From 1935 to 1941 his associate pastor was the Revd Petar Minkov Radev – a Baptist. He and his wife Anka had a special calling for mission work among Bulgarian Gypsies.<sup>32</sup> For issuing baptismal certificates to the Jews, both of them were sacked by the Fascist Government in 1941 and their minister's licences were withdrawn.<sup>33</sup>

The dismissal of Simeonov and Radev as ministers of the Evangelical Church under the statutes of LDN did not discourage the community from continuing their rescuing activities. Pastor Vasil Georgiev Zjapkov,<sup>34</sup> after taking on the position of senior minister of the First Evangelical Church vacated at Simeonov's removal from office, followed in his steps. As the representative of the Alliance of the Bulgarian Evangelical Churches,<sup>35</sup> he was actively involved with Metropolitan Stefan in 1943 in comforting the Jews and putting pressure on King Boris to prevent the deportation of Bulgarian Jews.<sup>36</sup>

For Simeonov, Radev and Zjapkov, as well as for the leadership of the Orthodox Church, it was clear that the mercy baptisms were just that—an act of mercy. Baptisms did not symbolise so much desired unity of faith

<sup>30</sup> His grandfather Simeon Benchov was an Orthodox priest active in the nineteenth century Bulgarian Revival who passed on the vision of the revival to his grandson (see Kulichev, ed. *Vestitely na Istinata* (Sofia, Bulgaria: Bulgarian Bible Society, 1994, in Bulgarian), pp. 275-6; cf. my interview with his daughter Lidja Asenova Simeonova, journalist of *Woman Today*, a national magazine, 14 March 2002, Sofia, Bulgaria, typed text). For Benchov's biography, see the entry in *Bulgarska Vazrozhdenска Intelegentzia [Encyclopaedia of the Bulgarian Revivalist Intelligentsia]* (Sofia, BG: Dr Petar Beron Publisher, 1988). For evidence of the idealistic spirit of the Revival still at work in sustaining Simenov's vision for the future of human relationship not only in Bulgaria but in the whole of Europe, see his imaginative article at the eve of the Second World War, Asen M. Simeonov, 'Panевропа' ['PanEurope'], reprint in *Zornitsa (Morning Star)*, Year 131, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 2-3; originally published in *Zornitsa*, Year 61, No. 14 (1937).

<sup>31</sup> A Service of induction was held on 15 November 1931, see 'Programma za ustanovjavane na pastir Asen M. Simeonov v I-va Evangelska Tsarkva, ul. Solun 16, Sofia' (Programme for the induction of Pastor Asen M. Simeonov in First Evangelical Church on 16 Solun street, Sofia).

<sup>32</sup> Kulichev, *Heralds of the Truth*, pp. 264-5.

<sup>33</sup> 'Reference: Concerning Asen Michailov Simeonov' (Simeonov's file in the Archive of the Directory of Police, 10 March 1958, p. 129. Absolutely Secret) and 'Agent's Report to The Chief Officer of Division "B," I-Department in regard to the investigation of Asen Mikhailov Simeonov', Report of agent of 23-rd group of the Division "B" of the First Department (Simeonov's file in the Archive of the Directory of Police, January 1950, p. 45, Sofia, Strictly Confidential). In January and February 1950 Simeonov was placed under surveillance and the last document reflects some of the agent's findings.

<sup>34</sup> Kulichev, *Heralds of the Truth*, pp. 273-5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>36</sup> There is evidence that Metropolitan Stefan was in touch with the evangelical communities in attempts to rescue the Jews (See eye-witness report of Veselin Ignatov, 'Pastir Zjapkov i Evreite' (Pastor Zjapkov and the Jews', *Zornitsa (Morning Star)*, Year 121, No. 4 (April 1997), p. 3, in Bulgarian).

in Jesus the Messiah. Christian ministers were well aware that there was no conversion of the heart in the acts of baptism. As Simeonov testified: ‘The majority of the Jews were experiencing such deep pain that they had to compromise their faith. And most of them did not do it out of changing their convictions, but because they were forced by the circumstances. Therefore I did not consider myself a missionary; my duty was simply to help them.’<sup>37</sup> In performing the act of formal baptism, ministers were not enforcing Christian salvific supremacy but practicing new humanity’s solidarity in which Nazis could not wreak their gruesome racism on Bulgarian Jews.

## The White Brothers

Finally, any analysis of the factors contributing to the delay and cancellation of the deportation of Bulgarian Jews will be incomplete ‘if it would ignore [the role of] Petar Dunnov—the leader of the White Brothers. ... Dunnov’s resolute position against deportation of the Jews has to be added to the efforts of all political, religious, intellectual and other segments in Bulgaria.’<sup>38</sup> Dunnov’s pressure on the King to stop the deportations is even more surprising considering his reserved and overall negative attitude towards the Jews.<sup>39</sup> He was firm however that ‘Bulgarians should be the last to persecute the Jews’.<sup>40</sup> One of Dunnov’s close disciples and the King’s confident—Lulchev—also happened to be a close friend of the controversial Jewish rabbi—Daniel Tzion from Sofia.<sup>41</sup>

The story of Bulgarian Christian communities standing in defence of their Jewish compatriots is a remarkable story. In line with the long Orthodox Christian tradition of blending moral living and public theology, which I have discussed elsewhere,<sup>42</sup> these communities gave a concrete

<sup>37</sup> Nikola Kjosev, ‘Pastir Asen Simeonov’, *Zornitsa*, Year 123, No. 5 (May 1999), p. 2, in Bulgarian.

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, ‘Political Golgotha’, pp. 71,73. Dunnov was a charismatic leader of a theosophical fellowship: He was born in an Orthodox priestly family in 1864, left for the US to study theology and medicine. Upon his return to Bulgaria he underwent a spiritual conversion. Beginning in 1901 he started travelling and preaching across the country, gradually developing his own religious community. By 1918 he had founded the White Brotherhood. ‘Dunnovists, usually peaceful people who condemned violence, were not involved in political activity, although some of them occupied important public offices’. One of them—former army major Ljubomir Lulchev—was King Boris’ spiritual adviser (Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, p. 247; Chery, *Bulgarian Jews*, pp. 147-8).

<sup>39</sup> Lulchev, *Taynite na Dvortsovija Zhivot*, pp. 22, 78, 95-6, 140, 196, 263.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 263-4.

<sup>41</sup> Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler’s Grasp*, pp. 191-2. Rabbi Tzion was personally connected with several Dunnovists and ‘studied the group’s beliefs’, but did not practice them (Chery, *Bulgarian Jews*, pp. 147-8).

<sup>42</sup> Parush R. Parushev, ‘On Some Developments in Russian Orthodox Theology and Tradition’, in Ian M. Randall, ed., *Baptists and the Orthodox Church: On the way to understanding*, IBTS Occasional Publications Series, volume 1 (Prague, Czech Republic: IBTS, 2003), pp. 81-97, and ‘Narrative Paradigms of Emergence – Contextual Orthodox Theological Identity’, *Religion in Eastern Europe*, volume XXV, number 2 (May 2005), pp. 1-39.

moral witness in action of faithfulness to a noble vision. In spite of their prominent participation in the rescue activities, Christian communities in Bulgaria have been given little credit in secular historiography. Even though there was widespread public support from all levels of societal structure for the acts of rescue, the unanimous support of the efforts by all Christian communities, without exception, is the most telling part of this story. Faced with the dilemma of taking sides in the confrontation of defiant people with a powerful and corrupt government, the religious leaders were firmly on the side of their flocks and of the Jewish people.

Nissimov's insights are worth quoting here: 'The period [of five hundred years of Ottoman domination over Bulgarians] is often qualified as slavery or yoke, but I have never heard a Bulgarian say: "We were slaves". A freedom-loving people cannot be other than tolerant and democratic.'<sup>43</sup> According to Nissimov, there have been several factors contributing to the rescue: general benevolent behaviour of the Bulgarian people; Macedonian immigrants in Bulgaria, 'who first sounded the alarm and organised effective protests; the King—willingly or not; the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, publicly and directly; anti-fascists and anti-monarchist groups' and the military circles to a certain extent who never publicly approved of anti-Jewish measures. 'The pressure from the Bulgarian public took the form of [activist] public opinion and [non-violent] protests.'<sup>44</sup> 'There are different arguments as to who saved us. For me this is the Bulgarian people.'<sup>45</sup> I will add, and their spiritual leaders.

To summarise, while many Bulgarians of the anti-fascist resistance movement were incarcerated in the concentration camps,<sup>46</sup> not one Bulgarian Jew was sent to the death camps. Thus the Bulgarian Jewish community survived the war and the Nazi domination, with only small numerical losses, which would seem to have been more than compensated for by the natural increase of the Jewish population and by the influx of some refugees from other Balkan countries.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

The story of Bulgarians rescuing their Jewish compatriots is a remarkable story. It calls for a theological explanation. Against the dominant theological trend of Christian supersessionism, the Bulgarians, guided by the spirit of the national revival, considered the Jews as their compatriots

<sup>43</sup> *By the Skin of Our Teeth*, p. 42, translation mine.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-5, translation mine.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 93, translation mine.

<sup>46</sup> My grandfather was one of them.

<sup>47</sup> Meyer et al., *Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, p. 575. According to Meyer, the losses were due to 123 Jews killed as gorilla-fighters, 1100 died in places of internment, and 3000 immigrated to Palestine.

with their own worth. It is important to remember and reflect theologically on the lessons of the *Shoah*.<sup>48</sup> The current virulent Arab (and Muslim), secularist and leftist antisemitism lends support to ancient and new anti-Jewish manifestation around the world.<sup>49</sup> The spread of Christianity 'south' in its most conservative and fundamentalist forms, and the emergence of modernist nationalism in many of the second- and third-world countries, pose a real challenge for theologies of Christian communities in avoiding the repetition of the racist incarnations of the Church's supersessionist complex in a multitude of contextual forms.

In this paper I have looked at another event in the dark moments of the *Shoah*: that of redemptive memories of the Bulgarian communities guided by their best moral insights which prompted them to stand firm in defence of their Jewish and Romani neighbours against all odds. Attempts to explain this maverick behaviour with socio-political reasoning have proven deficient.<sup>50</sup> I have argued that the ethics of salvation of Bulgarian Christian communities can properly be understood as embodiment of a moral vision. This was not a heroic spontaneous reaction. This is the ordinary face of Christian witness that had a spill-over effect on the social behaviour of ordinary citizens and on the policies of the government.<sup>51</sup> The Bulgarian experience of rescuing fellow Jews without necessarily abandoning their faith commitments and, on the contrary, being guided in the rescuing by those commitments, in my view, affirms that one 'living covenant that embraces two peoples in a relationship of tense reciprocity'<sup>52</sup> is a promising and biblically sound way ahead for considering Jewish-Christian relationships after *Shoah*.

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<sup>48</sup> For my earlier reflections on the lessons of the *Shoah*, see Parush R. Parushev, 'The Jews, the Church, and the Baptists: A Need For a Change?', *Ethics Daily of the Baptist Center for Ethics on Line*, <http://www.Ethics.daily.com> 2002.

<sup>49</sup> See e.g. Jerome A. Chanes, *Antisemitism: A Reference Handbook*, in Contemporary World Issues Series (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism*, joint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company/American Interfaith Institute and the World Alliance of Interfaith Organizations, 1997; originally published in Great Britain in 1992 by HarperCollinsReligious) and his *Anti-Semitism: A History* (Stroud: Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> See my extended account in 'Walking in the Dawn of the Light', pp. 302-16.

<sup>51</sup> On the concept of Christian witness to secular state, see John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, in Institute for Mennonite Studies Series, Number 3, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1977; originally published in 1964).

<sup>52</sup> Scott Bader-Saye, *Church and Israel after Christendom: The Politics of Election* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), p.100; cf. James Wm McClendon, Jr. *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume II* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 345-72.

## Book Reviews

Linda Wilson

***Marianne Farningham: A Plain Woman Worker***

Studies in Baptist History and Thought, Volume 18

Paternoster, 2007, 244 pages, ISBN 978-1-84227-124-7

Linda Wilson (London School of Theology and the University of Gloucestershire) explores the life and the bearing of a remarkable nineteenth-century Baptist woman who, so far, has been largely neglected by historians of English Baptists, nonconformists and evangelicals. Marianne Farningham was an educator, author, lecturer, and a significant public figure. The study provides an overview of her life, followed by a chapter exploring Farningham's attitudes towards the role of women in family, church and society. The book continues with the appraisal of her many years of work with girls in Sunday School (her primary church community, as Wilson argues). Another chapter is devoted to Farningham's public life. The study concludes with an investigation of her spirituality and its sources.

Farningham's influence, Wilson points out, is unquestionable (especially due to her contributions to the weekly *Christian World*), although her prolific writings (not only journalistic pieces, but also books and hymns) have been short-lived. This highlights one of the major threads of Wilson's study: in Farningham's understanding, Christian calling was not about great things, but, in Farningham's own words, about a 'great many little things'. A thesis is put forward that Farningham's approach was 'pragmatic' which assumed that whatever could be done, should be done, gender notwithstanding (but without abandoning a very strong emphasis on family life and domestic responsibilities). As Wilson repeatedly aims to show, although set in the Victorian era and sharing its romantic flavour, Farningham's writings and her life contributed to calling women into pioneering roles. Thus the study helps to highlight different shades and colours of construing women's roles in the family, church and society, rather than attempting to enforce neat categories which cannot do justice to the rich palette of Farningham's life. Only keeping this in mind Farningham can be considered to be 'both an evangelical and a feminist' (p. 96).

Enquiry into Farningham's personality includes her life as a single woman and picks up on her theological appropriation of singleness which, although not chosen, was accepted and appreciated. The study also provides a valuable investigation into the often disregarded practice of

friendship, surveying Farningham's large network of friends and their crucial significance for her sense of a fulfilled life.

*Marianne Farningham* is a helpful and exciting resource for those interested in English Baptist history. However, the witness of Farningham's life can also speak into other contexts which are marked by limitations similar to those Farningham experienced, thereby encouraging reflection on the ways such limitations can be faced, challenged, and subverted so that, as Farningham's life demonstrated, 'every experience' could be woven 'into a purposeful whole' (p. 32).

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Ian M. Randall and Anthony R. Cross (Editors)

***Baptists and Mission: Papers from the Fourth International Conference on Baptist Studies***

Studies in Baptist History and Thought, Volume 29

Foreword by David Bebbington

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This book comprises papers presented at the Fourth International Conference on Baptist Studies and provides a wide spectrum of perspectives on Baptist worldwide mission. It is a historical study of Baptist missions with nineteen contributions, all written by different authors. This variety represents many different mission approaches, case studies and historical insights on Baptist mission history.

Someone who looks for a coherent and systematic presentation of Baptist approaches to mission will be disappointed, as are systematic theologians who hope to find a systematic approach to theology in the Bible. But when the reader engages with the individual stories and case studies, he or she finds a rich treasure of materials touching on issues such as witness, evangelism, church planting, cross-cultural and overseas mission, medical and social mission ministry, and more. Discussed are issues of different characters (personality differences), gender issues, tensions between churches and conventions that lead to mission and evangelism, the controversy between social ministry and evangelism, involvement of lay people and professional missionaries, volunteer and tentmaking ministries. Much space is devoted to individuals and communities that are engaged in mission and evangelism. The variety of individuals, churches, conventions, mission agencies and other

organisations involved in mission demonstrates the creativity that Baptists display as they follow the call to be witnesses locally and globally. Amazing is how often Baptist immigrants and refugees become evangelists and missionaries. Such creativity of mission approaches often appears in tension in the book but has clearly been the reason for the immense growth of the worldwide Baptist community.

The limited global perspective and an absence of a multi-linear history of mission is caused by an Anglo-Saxon dominance of contributed articles (UK, Ireland, North America, Australia and New Zealand). There are a few articles that come from different contexts such as the contributions of Othniel Bunaciu and Valdis Teraudkalns. Also, articles describing different contexts are written from an Anglo-Saxon perspective or present a country such as India or Mexico as an object of Anglo-Saxon mission. Having made this critical remark, it is important to remember that the origin of Baptist mission goes back to the British Isles and is particularly due to the British mission which Baptists have grown and spread worldwide. Still, the presentation of a world-wide picture of Baptist missions by Baptists from different countries and continents is partly missing, so that, with a few exceptions, we primarily find a mono-linear view of Baptist mission endeavours. The contribution by Brian R. Talbot, which weaves together various strands and strives for multi-linearity, is an interesting exception.

One important element of Baptist missions, according to this book, is that evangelism and church planting locally have often been motivated by global mission involvement. At the same time, local revivals stimulated and enabled churches to send individuals to other countries to minister in a variety of ways. So local evangelism and planting of new churches seem to be interconnected with the wider mission. This is at least one of the many important lessons that Baptist history of mission and evangelism teaches us.

Much more can be found in this book and different readers – including those attempting to define what Baptist mission is and those who look for Baptist identity(ies) – will discover different things. The history of Baptist missions, as presented by Baptist historians in an interesting, engaging and thought provoking way, offers much to both. I would like to congratulate both the editors and all the authors on this excellent contribution.

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